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A VISIBLE CHURCH;
AND
NO INVISIBLE MEMBERS.

BY THE REV. RICHARD RYMER,
AUTHOR OF "MEMOIRS OF THE REV. WILLIAM JONES," &c.

*‘Ο δὲ Κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σωζόμενους καθ’
ἡμέραν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ.—ST. LUKE.*

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PREFACE.

A TREATISE on the church and church-membership has long been a *desideratum* in Christian literature. The history of the church has been recorded; the polity of the church has been ably discussed; "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" has been earnestly contended for; and the mission of the church has been eloquently argued. But the duty and privilege of Christian communion have not been either properly understood or duly considered; and the question, "Is it possible to be saved out of a church as well as in one?" has not been satisfactorily answered.

Impressed with these views, the author undertook to prepare a discourse on the subject; his materials grew and multiplied; the discourse became a volume; and now, at the call of numerous friends, it is published, with the earnest hope that a small contribution may not be unacceptable or unprofitable, where the means of a more liberal offering are wanting.

The argument of the work is original; and, on every question, the author has thought and reasoned for himself, as well as weighed the opinions and reasonings of others. But still some of his definitions and illustrations have often been employed in the exposition and application of the truth. Nor

can he see the impropriety of presenting the brilliant diamond of another, rather than a duller one of his own : preferring to expose himself to the charge of mental barrenness, rather than impair the strength of his argument, or weaken the force of its application. Such gems, however, have been introduced sparingly ; and they have been honestly acknowledged.

From modern writers the author has derived but very little help ; and, as not one has written largely on the main subject of this Treatise, he has been left to his own resources. The authorities which he has consulted on kindred topics are HOOKER, CHILLINGWORTH, USHER, BARROW, CHARNOCK, BATES, HOWE, and their predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. On all questions of Ecclesiastical Policy, as well as Christian Theology and Ethics, he has studied these great masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ; and should their writings have given a direction to his thoughts, or a force to his reasonings, he will rejoice that he has not studied them in vain. With modern theorizers, whether Puseyite on the one hand, or Rationalistic on the other, he has not the smallest sympathy ; and, regarding the authority of tradition and reason as secondary and subordinate in all matters of faith and practice, he would "ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS," and take for his motto, "THUS SAITH THE LORD," and, "THUS IT IS WRITTEN."

GREAT BRIDGE,

WEST BROMWICH,

August 29th, 1861.

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A VISIBLE CHURCH; AND NO INVISIBLE MEMBERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHURCH IS A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

“Who could found the Jewish and Christian Church but God? Who could support, govern, influence, and defend them, but Himself? Communities or societies, whether religious or civil, may be founded by *man*; but God alone can build His own Church.”—DR. ADAM CLARKE.

THE Jewish Church was a Theocracy. Passing over the church before the flood, and during the patriarchal ages, we cannot but have remarked, that the ancient people of God, who formed the nation of the Jews, were chosen out of the world, and placed under the immediate and visible government of the Most High. “Abram, a Syrian ready to perish,” was called from the house of idolatry, to be a witness for Jehovah. He became a sojourner in the land of Canaan, and left behind him a numerous family. “But there arose a mighty famine in that land;” and

the seed of Abraham, including Jacob and his family, were led by a series of the most mysterious, but remarkable, providences into Egypt, where they were preserved from perishing. On the accession of a king to the throne of Egypt, "which knew not Joseph," the chosen people of God became the victims of slavery and oppression, and the Egyptians their mighty and capricious lords. But when oppression wrung from the Israelites, groaning under their Egyptian taskmasters, the agonizing appeal to Heaven, Moses the servant of God was sent, and the day of deliverance began to dawn. A series of events took place, by which their redemption from their state of bondage in Egypt was at length achieved. The judgments of God upon Pharaoh and his subjects compelled them to give tardy release to their captives; and the hosts of the Lord, after prolonged slavery and ignominious depression, went out from the land. They assumed their separate form of national existence; they were gathered together into a compacted body, as a holy and peculiar people; they received the special and permanent institutions of heaven; and "the Lord was their Lawgiver, their Judge, and their King." The Jewish nation formed the Jewish church; the entrance into the church was by natural birth; every Jew was a member of the church; but the founder of the church was the Lord of the universe. "For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts

is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." *

The ecclesiastical as well as the civil polity of the Jews was not human, but divine. The law, with its rites and sacrifices, was not the institution of Moses, but the economy of God, attested both by miracles and prophecy. The history of the Old Testament is a history of miracles and prophecies, admirably calculated to sustain the faith and hope of the believers of those times; and we can only specify a few out of that rich and extensive variety which might be adduced. The ten plagues of Egypt; the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and the overthrow of their enemies; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; the falling of the manna in the wilderness, six days out of seven; and the supply of water produced by the smiting of the flinty rock, may be regarded as specimens of the miracles of the Mosaic economy. The prophecies relating to the Jewish nation, and the other nations incidentally mentioned in Scripture; and the prophecies relating to the character and offices of the Messiah, his birth and life, his works and miracles, his death and resurrection, his ascension and the outpouring of his Spirit, may be regarded as specimens of the predictions of the Mosaic economy.

The law was not only attested by a numerous and

* Isaiah v. 7.

splendid series of miracles and prophecies, clearly showing it to be of God; but it was connected with the most imposing and impressive ceremonial, indicating, by signs too plain to be misunderstood, the presence and power of God. There were sacred things, sacred places and persons, sacred times and seasons, sacred obligations and duties, under the law, of divine sanction, and of the most remarkable kind. There was the tabernacle, with all its rich and splendid furniture. There was the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of the high priest, by which the will of God was known in all doubtful and difficult cases. There was the ark of the covenant, containing the two tables of the law, written by the finger of God. There was the golden pot of manna. There was Aaron's rod that budded. There were sculptured representations of the cherubim, overshadowing the mercy-seat with their wings. There was, between the wings of the cherubim, the bright cloud of the divine presence; the visible glory of the Lord. There was the voice of God, giving answers to the people in an audible manner, when consulted by the high priest. There were the brasen altar and the costly sacrifices. There was the stupendous and magnificent temple of Solomon. There was the fire consuming the sacrifices, kindled not by human hand, but coming immediately down from heaven. There was the Spirit of prophecy. The rites and

ordinances, the worship and ceremonies, the priests and sacrifices of the law, were all of the most extraordinary character, bearing the impress of infinite intelligence, —*the mind of God*.

“But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”* In the eternal counsels of the Father, it was determined that Jesus Christ should come to introduce an economy for the removal of every spiritual evil, and the communication of every spiritual good. Numerous types prefigured his coming; the language of prophecy proclaimed his approach; the hand of Omnipotence prepared his way; and, at the appointed time, the great Redeemer appeared upon the earth, lived in humiliation and sorrow, and died in agony and disgrace. During the period of his personal ministry, the reality of his Messiahship and the divinity of his claims were confirmed both by the attestation of miracles and the fulfilment of prophecies. In the hour when he was crucified, the price of redemption was paid; the justice of God was satisfied; a full and complete atonement was made. “It is finished,” was the language of the meek, the resigned, but fainting sufferer; “and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.”†

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

† John xix. 30.

The resurrection of Christ, however, was the hope of the church.¹ "During his abode in the grave his enemies exulted, the world rejoiced, and his followers were dejected and dispersed. The desponding language of his disciples on their way to Emmaus was, 'We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel; and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.'*" The hope of the church was sunk to the lowest point of depression; and it seemed as if the name and the cause of Jesus were for ever entombed in his grave. But how gloriously was the scene reversed on the morning of the resurrection!" He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead!"† "For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God."‡ If Jesus Christ had continued in the state of death, his God-head could not have been proved; the redemption of a lost and ruined world could not have been accomplished; the small party of his followers must have been scattered, and his name and his honour extinguished for ever. But if he broke asunder the rocky sepulchre, burst the barriers of the tomb, and triumphantly rose from the dead, his true and proper divinity cannot be disputed; his sacrifice and atone-

* Luke xxiv. 21.

† Rom. i. 4.

‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

¹ See page 33.

ment must have been efficacious and satisfactory; and the kingdom of heaven must have been opened to all believers. This capital article of the Christian faith may be disputed by sceptical and worldly men; but it rests upon evidence which all the wit and malice and learning of infidelity have never been able to invalidate. The condition and number of the witnesses; their incredulity and slowness in believing the resurrection of Christ; the utter impossibility of their succeeding in imposing upon others; the facts which they themselves avow; the agreement of their evidence; the tribunals before which they stood; the time when this evidence was given; the place where they bore this testimony, and their motives for doing so; and the striking contrast in the conduct of the apostles before and after the event, are a brief summary of the argument for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such are the solid and immovable foundations on which the hope of the church is built.

When the work of human redemption was completed; when the claims of divine justice were satisfied; and when the blessings of the great salvation were procured for the whole human family, our Lord said to his apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature:"* or, as this is elsewhere more forcibly and fully expressed, "Go ye

* Mark xvi. 15.

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." *

The divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the full manifestation of the Holy Spirit in all the richness and variety of his gifts and graces, are necessarily and inseparably connected. The Christian dispensation is the ministration of the Spirit; and the ministry of the Gospel "is not of the letter, but of the Spirit." The Spirit was not given, to any large extent, until Christ was glorified; the Comforter did not come before his departure; and his amplest effusion was reserved to grace the triumph of the ascended Saviour, according to the language of the royal Psalmist: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." †

Of this divine visitation, the Pentecost, one of the Jewish festivals, was the chosen era. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come," the apostles were endued with such power, that none could withstand them. Their adversaries were confounded, and multitudes converted by means of their preaching. While the preaching of the cross was to them that

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

† Psalm lxxviii. 18.

perished "foolishness," it was to them that believed "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." That the apostles might be enabled to declare the truth of God, "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth," the Spirit of truth was given to them to guide them into all truth; and to confirm their testimony, they were enabled in the name of Christ and by the Spirit of God to work the most astonishing miracles. Languages which they had never before heard were at once fluently spoken; the sick were healed, and the lame walked; the living were struck dead, and the dead were raised to life. This extraordinary inspiration, and these miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit, were conferred on the first messengers of Christ for special purposes. The design of them was to enable the apostles to spread and establish Christianity among both Jews and Gentiles. The use of them was for the conviction of sinners, and the edification of believers. The gift of tongues, healing, prophecy, and miracles, which were possessed and exercised by the apostles, were the special and sensible attestations of God to the truth of the Gospel; and they rendered it successful against all opposition, and in the awakening of multitudes to a sense of their guilt and danger.

Nor were the effects of the apostles' preaching transient, but abiding. Repentance ripened into

genuine conversion. From a deep and serious conviction of the fact and danger of sin, those who were pricked in their heart were brought to the humble and thankful acceptance of divine mercy, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The precious blood of Jesus purged their consciences. It extended peace to them like a river, and the glory of redemption like a flowing stream. "Being justified by faith, they had peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." * A change took place within. The guilt of sin was not only purged away by the precious blood of Christ, but the dominion of sin was destroyed by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God," the first believers had their "fruit unto holiness, and the end was everlasting life." † A model church was formed; signs and wonders were wrought; a community of possessions followed;—a rare example of charity, but not of universal obligation; the fellowship of the faithful was established; and the number of believers was multiplied: "And the Lord added unto the church daily such as should be saved." ‡

Now who does not, upon the most rapid survey of these things, give expression to the sentiment, and utterance to the language, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the

* Rom. v. 1.

† Rom. vi. 22.

‡ Acts ii. 47.

ancient days, in the generations of old?"* Who does not pray for another Pentecost of Christianity; for baptisms of fire and tongues of fire; for larger effusions of the Holy Spirit upon the church and the world, that "the wilderness may be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest?" And who does not breathe the aspiration in every scene; in the buoyancy of health, and in the languor of sickness; amidst the active energy of life, and in the closing agony of death?—"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."†

* Isaiah li. 9.

† Psalm xc. 16, 17.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH IS CHRIST.

"THE head being of all other parts of the body most divine, hath dominion over all the rest ; it is the fountain of sense, of motion ; the throne where the guide of the soul doth reign ; the court from whence the direction of all things human proceedeth. Why Christ is called *the Head of the Church*, these causes themselves do yield."—
HOOKER.

"WHAT think ye of Christ?" was a question once proposed by our Lord to the Jews ; and it is a question which is worthy of the most serious regard of all. The thoughts which we ought to entertain of Christ, are only to be learned from the Holy Scriptures, which contain a full disclosure of his character and offices ; the high and important work which he engaged to accomplish ; and the relationships which subsist between him and his people.

Numerous indeed, and greatly diversified, are the official titles and descriptive appellations by which Jesus Christ is distinguished in the Sacred Writings. He is declared to be the Chief Shepherd of the sheep ; and as a shepherd he guides, defends, and feeds his people in the pastures of his word and ordinances. He is exhibited as the Great Prophet of

his people ; and as a prophet he is "mighty in word and in deed, teaching as never man taught." He is represented as the High Priest of our profession, who offered himself as "a sacrifice for a sweet-smelling savour," and who "ever liveth to make intercession for us." He is proclaimed "King in Sion," and "Head over all things to the church ;" and the prophets and apostles demand for him the allegiance of all human beings, "as King of kings, and Lord of lords." He is placed before us as the Foundation and Corner-stone of the temple of the universal church, out of which there is no sacrifice, and can be no acceptance.

Of all the titles, however, by which Jesus Christ is distinguished, none is more comprehensive and emphatic than that of HEAD ; and, as there can be no other relation of more vital advantage to the church, he is frequently exhibited as the head of his mystical body. The language is highly figurative, but highly expressive. Headship denotes chiefly, pre-eminence, and authority ; and Jesus Christ is Head of the church because he is superior to men and angels ; because in all things he has the pre-eminence ; and because his authority in the church is supreme, above all other power ; universal, controlling all parts of the church and all things pertaining to the church ; and perpetual, pervading the years of time and the ages of eternity. As the head is not .

only the highest part of man, but gives sense and motion to the body, so Christ is not only highest in the church, but quickens his people, giving understanding in divine things and power to do the will of God.

The offices of King and Head, though not identical, are substantially the same. Christ is King in Sion, as well as Head of the church; and while the phrases are not perfectly synonymous, they present the same relation under different aspects:—the one expressing his government of the world as well as the church; the other indicating his government of the church only. As King, he is at the head of a vast creation, a realm of immeasurable extent; swaying his sceptre, or lifting his rod, over every being that he has redeemed; and claiming the agency of every thing for the accomplishment of his purposes and the manifestation of his glory. “His kingdom ruleth over all.”* As Head of the church, he is seated upon a throne; receiving homage, enacting laws, and executing those laws, dispensing grace, and diffusing life, not in the wide world, but within the sacred enclosure of his fold.

As Head of the church, Jesus Christ possesses many peculiar and distinguishing characters.

HE IS THE NATURAL HEAD OF THE CHURCH;
Head of the church by nature; Head of the church

* Psalm ciii. 19.

as God. The pre-existence and Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ involve the right of headship : " Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature : for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers : all things were created by him, and for him : and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the Head of the body, the church : who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead ; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." * Men may make a mere creature the head of the church, if they please, as the Papists do ; or they may make a super-human or super-angelic being the head of the church, as the Arians do ; or they may make a good man, a martyr to the truth, and an example of humility, gentleness, and benevolence, the head of the church, as the Socinians do. But the Head of the church is Christ ; Christ as " God over all ; " Christ as possessing all the titles, the attributes, the works, and the worship of God : and where these truths are not admitted, where the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus Christ are not acknowledged, there can be no vital relation existing between him and those who profess to be his followers.

The fact that Jesus Christ is Head over all things, and therefore, as an undeniable consequence, Head of

* Colossians i. 15, 18.

the church, is most clearly and explicitly asserted in the word of God. The argument on this point is exceedingly lucid; but it may be briefly expressed. The incommunicable name, Jehovah, which is expressive of supreme Divinity, is applied by the inspired writers to Jesus Christ. "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name, whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"* Eternity is ascribed to Jesus Christ. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was."† Omnipotence is ascribed to

* Jer. xxiii. 6.

† Prov. viii. 22, 23. חכמה the speaker, is either the Divine *Λόγος*, the eternal Word, or Divine wisdom, including heavenly knowledge and reverent obedience. It is affirmed by some, that wisdom is here represented as claiming attributes, performing works, and dispensing blessings which are divine; and, on this account, the passage should be applied to the Word and Wisdom of God; the eternal Son of the Father; the possessor and dispenser of all the wisdom and intelligence in the universe. It is maintained by others, that wisdom is here introduced as a Divine person, appearing in a very lovely form, displaying her native worth and beauty; and, by the most persuasive appeals and the most affectionate mode of address, inviting the sons of men to listen to her instructions, and hearken to her counsels, for their good; and, on this ground, the passage has been applied to that practical wisdom which consists in true religion. But whichever view may be adopted, the doctrine in question cannot be disputed, as it is taught in other portions of the sacred writings. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." (Rev. xxii. 13.)

Jesus Christ: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." * Omniscience is ascribed to Jesus Christ: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." † Omnipresence is ascribed to Jesus Christ: "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." ‡ Immutability is ascribed to Jesus Christ: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." § The creation of all things out of nothing, and the preservation and government of all creatures and things, are ascribed to Jesus Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." || "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his

* Phil. iii. 20, 21. † John xxi. 17. ‡ Matt. xxviii. 20.

§ Heb. xiii. 8.

|| John i. 1, 3.

power.”* The worship and homage of angels and men are rendered to Jesus Christ: “And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.”† “And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”‡ The doctrine in question is so often either clearly asserted, or tacitly assumed, that to endeavour to exclude it from the Holy Scriptures is as hopeless as an attempt to separate colour from the rainbow, or extension from matter, or thought from mind. The conclusion to be deduced from this doctrine is, that Jesus Christ as God is, by natural and original right, the head of the church. While he is the root of being to everything that exists, the spring of life to every thing that lives, the fountain of excellence to every thing that is good, he must naturally and necessarily be the origin and end of all things in his church. The Lord of Hosts must be the Lord of the vineyard. The church was conceived in the Divine mind in eternity; it was called into existence by his almighty power; it is ruled by his infinite wisdom; it is filled with his universal presence; and, like its architect and builder, it will be changeless and eternal.

HE IS THE OFFICIAL HEAD OF THE CHURCH; Head of the church by office; Head of the church as Mediator. The administration of nature and providence had always been in his hands. At the head

* Hebrews i. 1-3.

† Hebrews i. 6.

‡ John xx. 28.

of a kingdom, filling eternity and immensity, he was, and, in comparison with him, there was none else. Suns lighted up their fires at his bidding; systems rolled to fulfil his pleasure; and, to accomplish his designs, the universe was stored with worlds and their inhabitants. Day and night, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, followed each other in regular succession, at his command and under his direction. Empires flourished and withered; nations prospered and waned; individuals were set up and put down, to execute his counsels, and perform his work. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father."* "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;"† that is, the actual administration of all the affairs of our world.

There is, however, another kingdom which God has intrusted into the hands of his well-beloved Son; —the mediatorial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is called the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. This kingdom was founded and established by Christ; and he administers all its affairs, and dispenses all its blessings. He publishes "peace on earth and good will toward men." He invites rebels against his government to return to their allegiance, and passes an act of grace upon all who comply with the invitation. He offers a full pardon and gracious

* Matthew xi. 27.

† John v. 22.

acceptance to all who will lay down the weapons of their rebellion, and submit to his authority. He distributes the influences of his Spirit to subdue obstinate hearts into cheerful submission, to support his faithful people under every burden, and to furnish them with strength for their spiritual warfare. He conquers their rebellious corruptions, quickens their languishing graces, and protects them amidst all their dangers. Among the advantages derived from his reign of mercy and grace are pardon, sanctification, and eternal glory. In this dispensation of beatitudes, he will, as the King set upon God's holy hill of Zion, pursue his bright and radiant course, until the whole human family shall be "blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed."

The reign of Christ in the kingdom of grace must be distinguished from his natural and providential government of the world, and regarded as that administration conferred upon him by God the Father, in consequence of his having completed the work of our redemption, and by virtue of which "all power is given to him in heaven and in earth." His dominion is founded upon his oblation; his exaltation is the reward of his humiliation. Because he disrobed himself of his glory, threw aside the ensigns of his majesty, stripped himself of the drapery of his divine character, clothed himself in the fading garment of our flesh, passed the threshold of death, and

became a sojourner in his domains, the highest homage of the universe is paid to him, not only as "God over all, blessed for evermore," but as the great Mediator between God and man. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."† Angels, men, and devils are all either his subjects or his vassals.

* Philippians ii. 5-11.

† Ephesians i. 20-23.

" All power is to our Jesus given
 O'er earth's rebellious sons he reigns;
 He mildly rules the hosts of heaven;
 And holds the powers of hell in chains."

While, however, his mediatorial reign is general, his authority in the church is particular; and it is the fruit of his death. Repentance and faith are his gifts. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." * The admission and exclusion of members rest with him. "He openeth, and no man shutteth; he shutteth, and no man openeth." † The motives to self-dedication and obedience are derived from redemption. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." ‡ "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." § The supreme Lawgiver of the church is Jesus Christ; and his teaching and the writings of the apostles embrace the full and perfect code of our holy religion, doctrinal and practical, in all its beauty, spirituality, and awfulness of obligation. Creeds, Catechisms, and Confessions may digest the things of God into summaries; they may be easily remem-

* Acts v. 31.

† Revelation iii. 7.

‡ Romans xii. 1.

§ 1 Corinthians vi. 20.

bered; they may cleave to the mind even to old age; but they are not binding upon the church, and they have no authority apart from the teaching and example of Christ. The inference to be deduced from these premises is, that Jesus Christ as Mediator has an acquired and additional right to headship,—the right of redemption and purchase. While he is the sole proprietor of the church as Lord of all, he is especially the rightful Owner and Governor of the church as the Redeemer of men. Power and right are two distinct things; and a man may have power to do what he has no right to do. Jesus Christ as God had power to rule over his house; but his right to rule arose from his assumption of our nature, and his expiation of our sin. “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;” * and therefore “righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”

HE IS THE VITAL HEAD OF THE CHURCH; Head of the church as the giver of life; Head of the church as “a quickening Spirit.” Our old anatomists considered the head as the source of vital principle to the body, diffusing warmth and life through the whole animal system. So Jesus Christ, considered in his distinguished and appropriate character of head, is the source of vital principle to his body, the

* Hebrews ix. 26.

church, diffusing spiritual health and life through all the members of the body. The head is not only the highest and noblest, but the most vital and important, part of the human frame. Seat of the senses and throne of the soul, it is more intimately and immediately, than any other part of the body, connected with the principle and functions of life. This source and centre of vital power gives energy to every other organ of the body; and when it is seriously and fatally injured, the functions of life cease. The seeing eye, the hearing ear, the feeling sense are paralysed. The muscular form; the strong athletic frame; the vigour, the dexterity, the activity of man are wasted by sickness, and blasted by the touch of death. This connexion between the head and the body is essential to life; and the loss of the head involves the loss of life. Applying these views to Jesus Christ, we are taught, not only that he has life in himself, and that he is the life as well as the light of men, but that he is the source of life to his own people.

This may be affirmed of our *relative life* of justification and pardon. Justification, in a legal sense, is an acquittal of the innocent; but, in an evangelical sense, it is the pardon of the guilty; a pardon not capriciously, but righteously, as well as mercifully, dispensed: and, in this particular, life is obtained, not through the prerogative of God, the exercise of

repentance, or works of obedience, but through Jesus Christ. "How man might be justified with God?" was a question on which the reason of man was silent; but which has been graciously answered in the word of God. While, on the one hand, that word lays us deep in the dust, as to our moral condition, and brings down every high imagination, so, on the other, it reveals to us the provisions of the infinite wisdom and love of God for relieving us from the penalty of guilt. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."* "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."† It is in the offering of the great sacrifice of the cross that the Most High satisfies his justice, and manifests his mercy; that he magnifies his law and makes it honourable, and bestows forgiveness on the men by whom that law has been broken and dishonoured; that he asserts all the inalienable rights of his government, and displays all the wondrous riches of his grace.

Of our *actual life* of sanctification and holiness it may also be affirmed, with equal propriety, that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The term "sanctification," in its general application, denotes a separation from common and profane, and a consecration to holy and sacred, purposes; but, in its par-

* Romans v. 1.

† Ephesians i. 7.

ticular application to the salvation of man, it denotes a deliverance from the power and pollution of sin, and a restoration to the image and likeness of God; and life, in this higher and more important sense, is obtained not by a process of gradual mortification and the acquisition of holy habits, but through Jesus Christ.

The life of Christ is the rule of our sanctification. "Leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps."* The character of Christ, as both inwardly and outwardly developed, was free from all sin, and full of all goodness. He was miraculously conceived of the Holy Ghost. That holy thing which was born of the Virgin Mary grew up in a course of unspotted purity and perfect rectitude. He could say to his bitterest enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He was not only perfectly free from sin, but he was adorned with every moral excellence. He was an example of unaffected and deep humility; of holy conformity to the law and moral perfections of God; of unparalleled patience and submission under all the sufferings and privations which he endured; of gushing charity and expansive benevolence to man; and of unwearied diligence and steady perseverance in the work assigned him to do. Never was there a character so spotless and unimpeachable, and so worthy of the admiration and imitation of man-

* 1 Peter ii. 21.

kind. The beauty of the divine image in him was refulgent in its original perfection; and in his followers it is marred and obscured, but still it is an accurate representation as far as it goes;—they have the mind of Christ; they are “followers of Christ;” they “walk as he walked.”

“Holiness to the Lord,” indeed, is the distinguishing character of the Supreme Being; the sum of all his lovely and adorable perfections, consisting in the unchangeable love of righteousness, and the unchangeable hatred of iniquity; and we are commanded to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” “Be ye followers,” that is, imitators, “of God, as dear children.” * Absolute perfection, however, is the sole prerogative of God. There is none holy as the Lord; there is none good but one. But Jesus Christ, by his assumption of our nature and endurance of our trials, has left us an example, adapted to the condition of fallen men, and the necessary finiteness and imperfection in degree of all created natures. With regard to his divine nature, he was absolutely perfect: he was essentially, infinitely holy, just, and good. With regard to his human nature, he was morally perfect: “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” And yet the Evangelist informs us that he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour

* Ephesians v. 1.

with God and man." Now between Christ and his followers there is a resemblance; but what a meagre and broken outline of the lovely, faultless, Divine Original! But nevertheless to be a follower of Christ is to be an imitator of Christ; and we only so far follow Christ as we tread in his steps.

The Spirit of Christ is the agent of our sanctification. "God hath from the beginning chosen us to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."* The natural and universal corruption of mankind is a fact as incontestable as it is melancholy. Who that believes the Scriptures of truth, who that listens to the voice in his own bosom, can doubt it for a moment? "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."† "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."‡ And whether we look into our own hearts, or reflect upon the condition of mankind in general, we must be convinced that we are all sinners. Assuming then the fact, that both we and all men are polluted, as well as guilty in the sight of God, we maintain that our hearts can only be purified and our habits of life changed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to which the sanctification of the saints is always ascribed in the Word of God. He opens the eyes of our understanding, that we may see what

* 2 Thessalonians ii. 13. † Romans v. 12. ‡ Ephesians ii. 3.

is the hope of our calling. He reproofs of sin, and works a secret conviction of its evil and danger in the heart. He is "the Spirit of grace and supplication;" the softened heart, the yielding will, all heavenly desires and tendencies are from him. He hastens to the troubled spirits of penitent men, creates in them a sense of the paternal love of God, and renews them in the spirit of their mind. He actuates the habits of grace when they have been formed, confirming our faith, reviving our hope, and perfecting our love. That the operations of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration and sanctification of human nature are such as to destroy the constitutional freedom of the will, suspend its volitions, irresistibly direct its choice, and supersede the necessity of co-operation, forms no part of our belief. We do not conceive of the agency of the Spirit as of a mechanical motion, a chemical operation, or a magical charm, but as the agency of one free and intelligent Spirit upon another free and intelligent spirit,—the Spirit of God and the spirit in man.

But "how can these things be?" The work of the Holy Spirit, in our regeneration and sanctification, is highly mysterious. But, in this particular, the analogy of religion to the constitution and course of nature is just and striking. The operation of matter upon matter is as much beyond our knowledge, as the action of spirit upon spirit; and the processes of

nature are as much beyond our comprehension as the workings of grace. "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear;" but the several laws which regulate the operations of nature we cannot unveil. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace;" but how "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," how the joy of fruition and the joy of hope are joy in the Holy Ghost, and how "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" is the fruit of the Spirit, we cannot comprehend. Essences and processes in nature we cannot reach: modes and operations in grace we cannot unfold. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God:" and there is every reason to believe that the only true philosophy of both nature and grace is *the will of God*.

The Word of Christ is the instrument of our sanctification. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."* The truth as it is in Jesus is pre-eminently the instrument of our salvation; the principal means to be employed in abasing our pride, awakening our consciences, calling forth our spiritual desires, and raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul

* John xvii. 17.

and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* This may be affirmed of Christ not only as *ὁ λόγος*, the personal Word, but as *ὁ διδάσκαλος*, the Great Teacher, including the whole of his teaching. While the truths of the Gospel enlighten the understanding and convince the judgment, the precepts of the Gospel govern the heart and sway the life: while the promises of the Word excite our hopes, the threatenings of the Word awaken our fears; and these together impel us to the cultivation and practice of all Christian holiness. The force of truth, however, is not inherent but derived; the Word is not the agent, but the instrument; the weapons of our warfare are only mighty through God; the Gospel of Christ “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;” and the truth, when apprehended by the understanding in the light of the Holy Ghost, exerts a salutary and sanctifying influence upon the heart and life.

Regarding Jesus Christ as the Head of the church, and, as such, the source of life to its members, we may apply this view to the *resurrection* and subsequent *immortality of the body*. While there will be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust, the saints alone “will awake to everlasting life;” and in this respect Jesus Christ is their Exemplar and Lord.

* Hebrews iv. 12.

"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him : knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more ; death hath no more dominion over him."*

The resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our resurrection. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order : Christ the firstfruits ; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."† Many rational and scriptural arguments may be adduced to prove that the dead in Christ shall rise again at the last day ; but the crowning proof is the resurrection of Christ. Supposing Jesus Christ had become captive instead of the conqueror of the grave, then death with regard to the body would have been an eternal sleep ; there would have been no redemption from the grave ; and, at the death of friends, to the pains of separation must have been added the sorrows of despair. But as surely as Jesus Christ "rose again the third day," we shall rise again ; he has swallowed up death in victory ; and he has exhibited in his own body an imperishable specimen of our immortality. "Go then, and search the tomb of Christ ; and see in his vacated sepulchre an infallible

* Romans vi. 8, 9.

† 1 Corinthians xv. 20-23.

pledge that your grave shall give you up, and that you, if you be found in him, shall be gathered in the general harvest."

Of the resurrection of Christ, which is the only sure foundation of faith and hope, we have the most convincing evidence. Jesus Christ was crucified; and the reality of his death has never been disputed. Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Pilate; and laid it, not in a distant and unknown place, but in his own family tomb. The sepulchre was made sure; the stone at the mouth was sealed; a watch of sixty Roman soldiers was appointed to guard it; and yet the body was missing, and in the state of death it was never more seen. The missing of the body was admitted both by the Pharisees and disciples; but the manner in which they accounted for the fact was widely different. The Pharisees affirmed, on the one hand, that while the Roman soldiers slept at their post, the disciples stole the body away. The absurdity of this report is manifest, when we consider that it is very unlikely that sixty men would be asleep at one and the same time; that death was the punishment among the Romans for sleeping on guard; that the disciples were timid men, and would not therefore make the attempt; that if they had made the attempt, the Jewish Sanhedrim would have punished them as criminals; and, as the question has been put, either the soldiers were awake or asleep: if they were awake,

why did they suffer the body to be stolen? and if they were asleep, how did they know that the disciples stole the body? The disciples, on the other hand, affirmed that an angel had descended and rolled away the stone; that they had entered the sepulchre and found not the body; that Christ had appeared to them and had conversed with them at different times for forty days; and that he had led them out as far as Bethany, and in the presence of them all ascended to heaven. The credibility of this report is manifest when we consider that the witnesses were slow to believe the facts; that they were many, and all agreed in their testimony; that they were assaulted by the populace and punished by the magistrate because they testified these things; that they bore witness not only before private, but public persons; that they wrought miracles in confirmation of their evidence; and that they met death under every form rather than deny the facts in question.

The advent of Christ will be the signal of our resurrection. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* No sooner will the sign of the Son of man appear, and the voice of the Son of man be

* John v. 28, 29.

heard, than the resurrection will be complete from Adam to the last of his sons : not one will be missing. Every grave will open ; its dust be re-animated ; and living forms be seen rising from its dark and dreary chambers over the surface of the entire globe. The event is sure ; but the time is hidden from our view. “ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”*

After his resurrection our Lord “ sat down on the right hand of God ;” and from thence he will come a second time to judge the world. The judgment of the great day is absolutely certain. It is highly probable, independently of revelation, that there will be a judgment to come. The moral agency of man supposes it ; men in all ages and countries have expected it ; the mysteries of providence cannot be explained without it ; and the consciences of men bear witness to it. The dictates of reason are confirmed by the declarations of Scripture. “ God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent : because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” † “ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in

* Matthew xxiv. 36.

† Acts xvii. 31.

his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* This is the period when the resurrection and transformation of the bodies of the saints will take place.

The glorious body of Christ will be the model according to which our bodies will be fashioned. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."† The person to appear is Jesus Christ; and the likeness refers to body as well as mind: "our vile body," or the body of our humiliation, will be altered and re-fashioned, "that it may be like unto his glorious body." The precise nature of the change which will be wrought in the body of the saint, as to its form, its mechanism, its qualities, its powers and endowments, cannot now be ascertained; but whatever that change may be, we are taught that it will "be fashioned like unto his glorious body," not the body in which he appeared on earth, but the body in which he appears in heaven. The glorified humanity of Jesus Christ was indeed shadowed forth on the Mount of Transfiguration, when "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light:" it was beheld by Saul on his way to Damascus, when "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:" and

* 2 Corinthians v. 10.

† 1 John iii. 2.

it was exhibited to the beloved disciple in the isle of Patmos, when "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." These, however, are only shadowy representations of the glorious humanity of Jesus Christ, which will be the model, the exemplar, the pattern, according to which our bodies will be fashioned. The transformed and glorified body of the saint will no more be encompassed with infirmities, or exposed to afflictions, or marked by deformity, or liable to death; but it will be like the body of Christ, beautiful and glorious,—

"Swifter than the lightning's ray,
And brighter than the sun,"—

lasting as eternity, and durable as the throne of God.

Of the *perfect and everlasting felicity of the righteous in heaven*, it is declared that it is "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord;" and, even with regard to this, Christ is emphatically our life. The glory of heaven is the purchase of our Saviour's death; the last and complete issue of all the high merits, the sharp conflicts, the glorious victories, the great achievements of our mighty Redeemer. "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* The happiness of heaven is not only purchased, but will be dispensed by Christ; and hence at the last day,

* Hebrews v. 9.

while he will irrevocably seal the doom of his enemies, he will pronounce an everlasting benediction upon his people, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* The presence of Christ will constitute the blessedness of heaven; he holds the most distinguished place in the world of glory; he is the centre of the glory that shall be revealed; and his presence constitutes, to the redeemed inhabitants, the principal charm of heaven. "In thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore:"† a description this which implies that Jesus Christ is the source of celestial, glorious, eternal beatitude.

Whether, therefore, we regard Jesus Christ as God, the Mediator of the New Covenant, or the Giver of Life, he is the sole head of the church; and to set up a mere creature, whether man or angel, as the head of the church, is with respect to his government what treason is with respect to civil government,—the highest offence.

This all-important relation he has sustained from the beginning. Head of the patriarchal race; Jehovah and acting God of the Old Testament; Inspirer of the ancient seers; the Lord, of whose glorious coming Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied; the Shiloh, to whom was to be the gathering of the people; the

* Matthew xxv. 34.

† Psalm xvi. 11.

substance of all the shadows of the law, and the subject of all the predictions of the prophets; he has been "master of the house" from the foundation, and will be at the fulfilment, when the superstructure shall tower in the finished majesty of its perfection. But his solemn inauguration and public recognition, as head of the church and king of saints, took place on his re-entering the celestial world. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool."* When he had finished the work which was given him to do, he was acknowledged, greeted, and crowned as Lord of all. Then it was that "ten thousand times ten thousand ministered unto him;" and that, leaving the trackless orbits of the comets far beneath his feet, he ascended through the starry heavens, which are but the dark concave of the purer regions, till he arrived at the temple of uncreated glory. Then, on his arrival at the New Jerusalem, was sung that song of exultation: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the king of glory shall come in."† On hearing this song of jubilee and rejoicing, the angels from within inquire, astonished at a mere man, as they are made by the Psalmist to suppose, claiming the right of entrance into those happy regions: "Who is this king of

* Hebrews x. 12, 13.

† Psalm xxiv. 7.

glory?" To which question the attendant angels answer in a strain of joy and triumph; and let all the redeemed from among men answer with them: "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle: The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory."* Heaven then expands wide her bright and celestial portals; and this exalted and illustrious personage is conducted in triumphant procession through the gates into the city, on which occasion angels strike their golden harps, and make the vaulted heavens resound, while they chant the anthems of his praise, and celebrate the honours of his triumph.

* Psalm xxiv. 8, 10.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHURCH IS A VISIBLE SOCIETY.

"He founded a church to be to mankind a standing memorial of religion, and invitation to it: which he promised to be with always, even to the end. Of this church all persons, scattered over the world, who live in obedience to his laws, are members."—BISHOP BUTLER.

"God hath had ever, and ever shall have, some church visible upon earth."—HOOKER.

WORDS are signs of things. Language is the vehicle of thought. As signs, words should always express the things signified. As a vehicle, language should always convey sentiment. Without this perspicuity and precision counsel is darkened by words without knowledge; and the truth, which should be inculcated and enforced, is veiled in partial or entire obscurity. Verbal accuracy is of the utmost importance. This is especially the case in the question before us. The term "church" has such a variety and latitude of meaning in the sacred Scriptures, and is used so vaguely and indeterminately in other writings, that it is impossible for us to proceed until we have ascertained and determined its use and application.

The Greek word *ἐκκλησία* means "an assembly or congregation," and may be applied to any concourse of

people, good or bad, gathered for lawful or unlawful purposes. It is derived from ἐκκαλέω, "to call out of or from," signifying an assembly gathered out of a multitude; and, as applied to the people of God, it is always connected with some other word which determines its meaning. Thus we have the phrase, "the church of God," meaning a body of men called of God, and devoted to his service: "the church of Christ" denoting the followers of Christ, who believe in his name, imitate his example, keep his commandments, and expect his second appearing: "the church which was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla," indicating a company of Christians, assembling in a particular house which was dedicated to the worship and service of God: and "the church of Antioch, of Corinth, of Jerusalem," pointing out a collection of particular societies united together under the direction and influence of a common government.

There is the conventional, as well as the scriptural, use of the phrase. The society of those who profess the faith of Christ, and undertake the evangelical covenant in opposition to false religion, are denominated "the church." The whole body of the faithful of every age, from the creation to the final consummation of all things; of every language, who, while here, are barbarians to each other; of every nation, scattered over the islands, continents, and seas of this vast globe; and of every grade of science and intellect, from the

rudest to the most enlightened and accomplished of the human race, who have believed in Christ and obeyed his commandments, are designated "the church." The church Catholic includes Christians of every name and denomination, throughout the world. The church militant represents the people of God on earth, contending with a depraved nature, the temptations of Satan, and the allurements of the world. The church triumphant designates the saints glorified in heaven, who have fought, conquered, died in the Lord, and been crowned as victors. Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches are conventional phrases pointing out forms of government, rather than modes of faith.

"Church," says the judicious Hooker, "is a word which art hath devised, thereby to sever and distinguish that society of men which professeth the true religion, from the rest which profess it not. There have been in the world, from the very first foundation thereof, but three religions: Paganism, which lived in the blindness of corrupt and depraved nature; Judaism, embracing the law, which reformed heathenish impieties, and taught salvation to be looked for through one whom God in the last days would send and exalt to be Lord of all; finally, Christian belief, which yieldeth obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and acknowledgeth him the Saviour whom God did promise."

The church is not a material building, or an ecclesiastical corporation, or a civil institution, or a conventional arrangement; but, generally considered, it is an assembly of men professing godliness; and, particularly considered, it is a "congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance," or the whole collection, the entire assemblage of such societies, through the world. Of all the acceptations of the term "church," the latter chiefly comes under our present consideration: others claim only brief and incidental notice. The church of Christ, in its largest sense, consists of all who have been baptized in the name of Christ; who acknowledge him as the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world; and who profess to believe the doctrines taught by him and his inspired apostles. In a stricter sense, it consists of those who are united to Christ, as the members of the body to the head, as the branches to the vine, as the building to the foundation; and who, being imbued with spiritual life and power, "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Taken either in a larger or more restricted sense, the church of Christ is a *visible society* bound to observe the laws of Christ, its sole head and Lord. It was always the design of our Lord, that his church should be visible, and that it should stand forth

prominently and conspicuously in the world, as his church. He himself formed a visible church; he collected disciples while he was upon earth; he commissioned his apostles to "go and teach" or disciple all nations; after his ascension, he shed abroad the richest effusions of his Spirit to "draw all men unto him;" he placed his church under certain rules and regulations, and he intended that his church, thus constituted and disciplined, should stand forth in the world to the end of all time for the exhibition of the truth of his doctrine, and the effects of his religion.

Various are the figures employed in the word of God to designate the corporate character of the church, as well as its relations to the Great Head of the church. The church is *a body*, and Jesus Christ is "the head of the body the church." The church is *a building* of living stones; and Jesus Christ is "the chief corner-stone" of connexion, and strength, and beauty. The church is *a house*; and Jesus Christ is "the master of the house." The church is *a family*; and it is called by the name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church is *a flock*; and Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd. The church is *a royal priesthood*; and Jesus Christ is "the high priest of our profession." The church is *an army*; and Jesus Christ is "the captain of our salvation," "the leader and commander of the people." The church is *a husbandry*; and

Jesus Christ is the vine, and his people are the branches. The church is *a community*; and Jesus Christ is "the Prince of peace." The church is spoken of as "the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem;" "the mountain of the Lord, to which all nations shall flow;" "the general assembly and church of the first-born;" and "a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people." The significant titles by which the church is thus designated, indicate or point out large collective bodies of men, rather than individuals.

To the church, both in the larger and more restricted sense, these descriptions apply; but *in a more special manner*, and with *more peculiar emphasis*, to the real than to the merely professing church. "For because this visible church doth enfold the other," says Dr. Barrow, "as one mass doth contain the good ore and base alloy; as one floor the corn and the chaff; as one field the wheat and the tares; as one net the choice fish and the refuse; as one fold the sheep and the goats; as one tree the living and the dry branches: Because this society is designed to be in reality what the other is in appearance, the same with the other: Because therefore presumptively every member of this doth pass for a member of the other, the time of distinction and separation not being yet come: Because this in its profession of truth, in its sacrifices of devotion, in its practice

of service and duty to God, doth communicate with that: Therefore commonly the titles and attributes of the one are imparted to the other."

The plain and unvarnished statements of evangelical truth are in perfect agreement with the figurative representations of Scripture. Wide fields here open to our view. The teaching of our blessed Lord, and the writings of his divinely inspired apostles, are full of this doctrine. Throughout the whole of the New Testament, the church is represented not as a *private*, but as a *public* institution, adapted and designed to enlighten and save mankind.

Of these views we have the most express and unequivocal declaration in the discourses of our Lord. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Christianity, as exhibited in the lives and diffused by the efforts of its disciples, shines for the illumination and salvation of mankind. The followers of Christ are not only private but public characters; they not merely receive, but communicate; the religion of Jesus is not exclusively a personal thing, an affair between God and the soul;

* Matthew v. 14-16.

but a social thing, an affair between man and man. But how are Christians properly to sustain this relation, and effectually to fulfil this mission to the world, unless they are gathered together into one body, and united in their efforts to do good to others? The light shed upon the world by the conduct of the church, in the public walks of usefulness, is as much superior to that which is shed by the example of an individual, in the private walks of life, as the moon when shining in all her brightness is to the dim twinkling of a taper.

The church is built upon the surest foundation, and effectually guarded against all the assaults of earth and hell. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Many very learned, argumentative, and critical dissertations have been written on this remarkable saying of our Lord, and indeed the passage is confessedly difficult; but the difficulty vanishes before the spirit of calm and prayerful meditation. Waiving, however, all critical inquiry, which would not be adapted to our present purpose, we remark, that while every society of Christians, holding Christ as the Head, and building upon Christ as the foundation, is a *church*, the whole body of the faithful throughout the world is the *church of Christ* here

* Matthew xvi. 18.

described. It is not the church of Antioch, the church of Corinth, the church of Jerusalem, or any other body of Christians, that is here spoken of, but all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity in every place. The church is here, and in several other portions of the inspired records, compared to a building, "a spiritual house," "a temple," because it is established not only for religious services, but for public ends; and its members are called "living stones," not only because they have been quickened into spiritual life by the power of the Holy Ghost, but because they are parts of a living church, compacted together, which exists for the purpose of quickening others, diffusing life, and impregnating the dying mass of mankind with the seed of immortality.

Chosen of God and separated from the world, Christians are not to expect the approbation of the world as to their principles, or the complacency of the world as to their course of holy living. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."* The church and the world are described in the sacred writings as two different and distinct societies, attached to separate parties,

* John xv. 18, 19.

actuated by a different spirit, and governed by opposite principles and maxims. The church of Christ are represented as "chosen out of the world," as "separate" from the world, and as having "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." In their habits of thought; in their motives of action; in their objects of pursuit; in their sources of enjoyment, they are "not of the world." This election of grace and moral separation from the world cannot fail to excite that contempt, opposition, and hostility which are the seal of our calling and the proof of our discipleship. Let Christians expect these things; it is wisdom to do so; it is good policy to do so; so that they may arm themselves against all the hatred and persecution of men; and "be able to withstand in the evil day." But all this proceeds on the principle, and involves a recognition of the fact, that the church is a separate and distinct society, "hated of all men."

The same principles are assumed, and the same conduct described, in the Acts of the Apostles, which are a faithful record of the rise, progress, and persecution of the church. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* The primitive and apostolic church are here described as a community or association formed for religious objects.

* Acts ii. 42.

They not only received but retained and held fast the truth ; they were brought out of the world, and lived in Christian fellowship, holding a communion of holy delight one with another, and building up each other in their most holy faith ; and they united together in breaking bread, to put themselves in remembrance of the death of Christ, and in prayers, mingling their supplications, so that their harmonious prayers ascended as a cloud of incense to heaven, and as “ a sweet-smelling savour.” But how are these objects to be attained, if Christians are to keep their religion to themselves, and if the church is to be a house divided against itself, or if there is to be no church at all ? Without an outward and visible church, vital and important truth would soon be displaced by awful and destructive error ; there could be no holy communion at the table of the Lord ; and there could be no united prayer and effort for the spiritual improvement of the church and the moral regeneration of the world.

From the beginning, the church of the apostles had to face a host of assailants from without ; but, after a while, the storm subsided, the demon of persecution was held down, and large accessions of piety and numbers followed. “ Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified ; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multi-

plied.”* For αἱ ἐκκλησίαι several versions have ἡ ἐκκλησία. Every assembly of Christians was a church; and the aggregate of these assemblies was the church. The term εἰρήνην denotes not only peace, but prosperity, including an increase of piety and zeal on the part of God’s people, and the awakening and conversion of sinners. Rest from persecution and consequent spiritual progress are here connected together; and both these things necessarily involve the union of believers among themselves under their head. Without the confession of Christ before men, there would be no persecution “for righteousness’ sake;” and without a broad line of demarcation between the church and the world, there could be no increase as to piety and numbers. It is impossible to persecute a sect on the one hand, or to edify and multiply a society on the other, which has no positive existence. The prevalence of persecution, the edification of believers, and the multiplication of converts, prove beyond all question the existence of a persecuted and prosperous church. If these things are affirmed of Christians, the church cannot be a mere name, a fiction of imagination; but it must be a reality.

“The elders of the church” of Ephesus were assembled at Miletus by St. Paul, and addressed in the most solemn and impressive language. “Take

* Acts ix. 31.

heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* The Greek words *ἐπίσκοποι* and *πρεσβύτεροι* designate the same functions, and the same functionaries of the church. The elders were overseers,—all venerable for their character and years, and some just on the verge of eternity, the verge of heaven. The overseers were those who were set apart to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, call sinners to repentance, and administer the discipline of the church. The church intrusted to their care and placed under their rule, was the church of Christ; the purchase of his blood, and the subjects of his grace. The relation between minister and people, the duties of the one and the obligations of the other, are points which do not here come under review. The consideration to be particularly noted is, that the church, including ministers and members, the teachers and the taught, those who are appointed to rule, and those who should "obey them that have the rule," must be a visible and not an invisible body of men, professing the faith and observing the laws and institutes of Christ.

Such also is the doctrine of the Pauline and other Epistles, which are fraught with church principles of great practical importance. "Be not unequally

* Acts xx. 28.

yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? and what communion hath light with darkness ? And what concord hath Christ with Belial ? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel ? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols ? for ye are the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”* The renunciation of all criminal and injurious intercourse with the world is thus strictly enjoined upon us in the Word of God, and stands connected with a promise expressive of the relationship which subsists between God and his people. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon,” is a standing maxim through all generations. The world and Mammon may contest the ascendancy with God, things seen with things unseen, and earth with heaven ; but still we must resign all things which are opposed to the will of God. “Temptations, they must all be resisted ; indulgences, they must all be denied ; conformities, they must all be forsworn ; we must trample under our feet whatever will not bear

* 2 Corinthians vi. 14-18.

the test of truth and holiness; and we must cultivate a diligent, prayerful, and habitual preparation for the abodes of that eternity, where Jehovah dwells in his glory, where nothing that defileth can enter, and where all shall be spotless purity for ever." The church must be visible to every eye; and it must bear this inscription, "Holiness to the Lord."

The line of separation between the church and the world is marked out by St. Paul, with peculiar strength and precision, in another portion of his writings. "Do all things without murmuring and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."* The figure is taken from the sun and moon; and it is equally just and striking. Light is the emblem of knowledge, holiness, and happiness; and as the sun and moon are the source of light by day and night, with all its attendant advantages, so the people of God are the means of spreading knowledge, holiness, and happiness among their fellow men. *Φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ* denote not only the sun, pouring forth the lustre of his meridian rays, and imprinting beauty

* Philippians ii. 14-16.

and gladness on every part of this green earth; and the moon walking in her brightness, shining with a borrowed light, and turning night into day; but the stars rolling so majestically in their appointed spheres, sweeping immeasurable spaces, and studding the firmament with gems of beauty. There is here an allusion also to towers which were built at the entrance of harbours, on which fires were kept during the night to direct ships into the port. All these are images of publicity, conspicuity, and utility, as well as splendour and magnificence. The sun, the moon, and the stars are public bodies, seen and felt by the whole creation, rational and irrational. "There is no speech, nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun."

Distinctive peculiarities mark the church; and the points of contrast and opposition, as well as the points of agreement, between the church and the world are enumerated by St. Peter: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."* A generation is a race of men living at the same time, and varying in dif-

* 1 Peter ii. 9.

ferent periods of the world as to duration; and the church is a chosen generation, because it was predetermined in the divine counsels before the foundation of the world that Jesus Christ should "come to seek and save that which was lost," that all who repent and believe in Christ should be pardoned and redeemed, and that all who are "faithful unto death" should "make their calling" to holiness "and their election" to glory "sure." A priesthood is a particular class of men, set apart by divine institution, to "offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;" and the church is a royal priesthood, because its members are "kings and priests unto God,"—"a kingdom of priests," invested with the royal and sacerdotal dignities;—the highest that can possibly exist among men, and showing the dignities and privileges of the children of God. A nation is a people distinguished from another by geographical boundaries; and the church is a holy nation, because its members, its constitution, and its aim bear the impress of holiness. A people are known by their heraldry, their language, and their customs and manners; and the church is a peculiar people, because its members can boast a higher origin and nobler descent than the proudest monarch that ever filled a throne and swayed a sceptre; because they speak another and different language; and because their course of conduct and habits of life distinguish them from the rest of man-

kind. All these phrases are used to designate not the few, but the many, not the individual, but the multitude; teaching us that the church "is not one member, but many;" not a solitary individual, known only to God, but a multitude of privileged and devoted Christians, "known and read of all men."

We have now adduced passages of Scripture which may be regarded as examples or specimens of the teaching of our Lord and his apostles on this subject; and we have seen that all these passages involve the ideas of visibility as opposed to concealment, union as opposed to isolation, separation from the the world and consecration to God, association for religious objects and enterprises, a permanent conjunction of interests, and an intense reciprocation of feeling.

As a visible society or corporate body, and not as isolated individuals and fragmentary parts, the church has existed in every age of the world and under every dispensation of grace, patriarchal, prophetic, and Christian. Exactly accordant with the plain teaching of Scripture are existing facts. There has never been a period of the world when there has not been a professing and witnessing church. Before the flood, Noah was a preacher of righteousness, unfolding his message, and reproving the world of the ungodly; and both he and his family were saved

from perishing by water. After God had purged the old world, and entered anew into covenant with Noah and his family, the patriarchs were divided and distinguished from the world around them, and exercised the functions of the priestly office on behalf of themselves and their families. The Jewish nation, which formed the Jewish church, were preserved a separate and distinct people amidst all the vicissitudes of the kings and kingdoms of the world; and they bore a public and a faithful testimony to the doctrines and duties of natural and revealed religion amidst the idolatry and superstition which were enthroned in the surrounding nations. They were the light of the world and the salt of the earth, diffusing knowledge, and exercising a conservative and beneficial influence on the various nations of the earth. When Jesus Christ came to set up and establish the new dispensation and Christianize mankind, he called the apostles to relinquish the common avocations and means of subsistence on which they depended. Christ said to the brothers, Peter and Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men: and they straightway left their nets and followed him." Then he saw two others, "James and John, in a ship with their father, mending their nets, and he called them: and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." Thus also he called Matthew: "He saw him sitting at the receipt of custom, and said

unto him, Follow me: and he arose and followed him." After the number of twelve had been chosen, he issued the great commission to preach the Gospel and disciple all nations. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." * "Satan fell like lightning from heaven," from the thrones, the temples, the judgment-seats, and the schools of the ancient civilized world; the idolatry of ages was renounced; countless and innumerable multitudes were won over to the obedience of faith; and Christ was adored through the vast extent of the Roman Empire, and many of the nations beyond even its ample sweep.

The propagation of Christianity in the first century was miraculous; and had the same rate of progress, the same ratio of increase, been continued, the Gospel would soon have been preached to all nations. But this state of things did not continue. The light of the church sustained an awful eclipse; a night of a thousand years succeeded a glorious Gospel day; and the truth was so mutilated, corrupted, and supplemented, that it was all but disarmed of its power to enlighten and save the soul. Without disregarding the other errors and corruptions which crept into the church, our attention is mainly arrested with the great apostasy which, by slow degrees, and in a

* Mark xvi. 20.

stealthy manner, ignored "the form of sound words," and substituted another rule of faith and practice. We may here specify the infallibility of human councils, the traditions of the church, transubstantiation or the real presence, auricular confession and priestly absolution, purgatory in a future state, prayers for the dead, the invocation of saints, the worship of images, the merit of good works, and all the absurd mummery of one of the most splendid superstitions in the world. The light of heavenly truth was greatly obscured, if not extinguished; the comely order of God's house was turned into confusion; the beauties of holiness into noisome impurities; and the house of prayer into a den of thieves. But even amidst all this darkness, disorder, and pollution, there were steadfast and witnessing churches. The Waldenses, the Lollards, the Hussites, and others "professed a good profession before many witnesses;" and were "faithful unto death," the death of martyrdom. The people of God were "minished and brought low;" but at the Reformation the church started forth again, with a giant strength, to bless the world.


The church, as an external society or collective body, has had to encounter the fiercest opposition; and, without the strength of union, as well as the arm of Omnipotence, it must, humanly speaking, have been utterly destroyed. The oppression of external

violence has been aggravated by the more dangerous and insidious attacks of internal enemies. The church has sustained injury from within, as well as from without; and her worst foes have been those of her own household. Men professing godliness, occupying places of trust, and disguising their character and unbelief, have sought and *still seek stealthily* to destroy all that is vital and saving in the Christian system. But, in mighty phalanx joined, and "strong in the Lord and the power of his might," the church has triumphed over the strongest opposition; it has survived the vicissitudes of time; it has outlived revolutions which have shaken the world; and, notwithstanding the persecution of ancient and the infidelity of modern times, it continues and grows to this day. The church has been resisted by argument, and encountered with ridicule; its doctrines have been explained away by sophisticated interpretations of Scripture, and its members have been oppressed by the power of persecution; but it "is the pillar and ground of the truth." The church was opposed during the patriarchal and prophetic times, in the early ages of Christianity, under the Roman Emperors, during what has been emphatically called the dark age, and at the time of the glorious Reformation, when Luther, Melancthon, and others adopted as their motto, in spirit, if not in words, "THE BIBLE, THE BIBLE ONLY,

IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS!" and threw off the nightmare of a thousand years; but it "is founded upon a rock." The church has been resisted by the will of monarchs, the policy of statesmen, the edicts of senates, the decisions of magistrates, the subtlety of schoolmen, and the wisdom of the world; "but the gates of hell cannot prevail against it." Passing over the attempts made in ancient times to crush the church, we may remark, that under different forms the enemy revived and the contest was renewed, but in every age it has been maintained. We need not run over even the heads of the history of the church. What is the present state of things? "While one generation of opposers has passed away after another," from Cain, who slew his brother, down to the coming of Christ; and "from Julian down to that directing genius of infidelity, Voltaire, whose impious ingenuity was stretched to the uttermost to devise expedients for the destruction of the Christian religion, who adopted as his motto, 'Crush the wretch,' and who vainly boasted that he would show the world the sufficiency of one man to destroy a religion which required the efforts of twelve for its establishment; yet 'the foundation of God standeth sure;' the triumphs of the religion of the cross are multiplied and multiplying; and the same spirit by which apostles were first sent out to preach the Gospel is at this day opening the eyes of myriads to behold its

glories; and, by applying it to their consciences, is rendering it 'the power of God unto their salvation.' " Now while the external organization of the church has provoked the hostility of men, it has been a stronghold in the day of trouble; and but for the power of combination, and the strength of Omnipotence, the church could not have overcome all opposition, and subsisted in undecaying vigour from age to age and from generation to generation.

From the first sinning pair, who were restored to the favour of heaven, to the last man who shall confess Christ to the end of all time, the people of God are *one visible church* in the world; and to think of the entire body of the servants of Christ and God, who have been dispersed through so many ages, and such a vast variety of circumstances, "persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed,"—is not the idea fraught with sublimity? There have been law-givers; there have been prophets; there have been priests and seers; there have been apostles; there have been martyrs; there have been ministers and teachers; there have been missionaries; there has been a mighty multitude which no man can number, gathered for salvation. What a noble army! What a glorious company! What a cloud of witnesses! Dissevered by oceans and continents; far apart on the stream of time, and variously denominated and distinguished among themselves; still they are one



in Him, "who is the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea." Of Him also "the whole family in heaven," as well as "earth, is named." Ages have rolled away; kingdoms have been set up, and put down; worlds have been created and destroyed; but the church stands, amidst the lapse of ages, and the waste of worlds, a single and a solitary monument.

Church order and government come under this head; but, as the aim of the author is purely practical, the questions cannot be entertained. The reader may consult on these points Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity," Watson's "Theological Institutes," and Lord King's "Account of the Primitive Church."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENTRANCE INTO THE CHURCH IS BY FAITH AND A SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

"THE basis of the church was to be, not natural descent from a common head ; marking out, as that church, some distinct family, tribe, and, as it increased in numbers, some one nation, invested too, as a nation must be, with a political character and state ; but faith in Christ. The persons who first believed were, for the most part, real Christians, in the sense of being truly and in heart turned to God."—RICHARD WATSON.

THE *Theo-Politica*, or Kingdom of God, is the church of God ; and the way of entrance into the kingdom of grace here, and the kingdom of glory hereafter, is the new birth. The entrance into the Jewish church was by natural descent from Abraham ; but the entrance into the Christian church is by spiritual regeneration through faith in Christ. Such is the doctrine of the Great Teacher.


"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews : the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man

can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." * Nicodemus, as to his rank, was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, a supreme national council, which was composed of seventy members, and which sat in judgment on all questions of the law, and in all cases of heresy and blasphemy; and, as to his religious profession, he was a Pharisee,—a strict observer of the law and tradition. The miracles which our Lord had wrought, and the works which he had performed in the sight and for the benefit of the people, had produced a deep impression on his mind; and, inferring that Christ was a prophet, and might be the great prophet promised to the fathers, he stole away silently through the streets of Jerusalem, under the covert of night, not to gratify a vain and prying curiosity, but to salute the Galilean stranger, and to be instructed in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He thus adopted a course which he believed would preserve his dignity and remove his doubts.

Our Lord, well knowing the gross and grovelling conceptions which the Jewish nation, for a series of ages, had indulged respecting the purpose and design of his coming into the world, on this occasion strikes at the root of these popular and prevailing erroneous opinions. The Jews had understood their prophecies to prefigure the advent of some great

* John iii. 1, 2.

personage who, by supernatural assistance, should establish a mighty kingdom, and push his conquests to the extremities of the world; who should appear with numerous armies and embattled legions in the land of Judea, with a golden sceptre, and a throne of majesty; and who should in particular raise their nation to a state of independence, and to a supreme degree of splendour and prosperity. From a strange and false interpretation of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, they had looked for an earthly prince and leader of high and brilliant name; for a kingdom of this world; for victory and conquest; for honour and supremacy among the nations. This was the reigning opinion and the prevailing expectation of the times; and with these views the mind of Nicodemus was imbued. "It was not, however, to deliver an oppressed nation from civil tyranny, or to erect a great civil empire, or to achieve one of those acts which history accounts most heroic, that Jesus Christ came into the world. It was not a mighty state, a victor people, that was worthy to enter into the contemplation of the Son of God. It was to deliver a world from ruin; to abolish sin and death; to purify and immortalize human nature; and to become the Saviour of men and the blessing of all nations." Without waiting, therefore, to hear the ruler's question, our Lord apprises Nicodemus, in this interesting conversation, that his kingdom is not of



this world ; and that, contrary to the expectation of the Jews, and to the forced and fanciful interpretations which they had put on the Scriptures of the Old Testament, a man must become a new creature, before he can become a subject of it. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily," a most solemn preface, "I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." *

Nicodemus, being struck with astonishment at this declaration of our Saviour, and not being able to unravel the mystery, proposes what some people may think a very foolish question, but which was the result of that anxious solicitude of mind which he felt, and which was justified by the circumstances in which he was placed, and the confusion in which he was involved : or perhaps it might arise from a desire of obtaining a more full and particular account of the nature, the causes, and the consequences of the New Birth. "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old ? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ?" † still understanding the words of Christ in a gross and literal sense : or, as if he had said, "We Jews are already regenerate ; we are descended from Abraham, and become subjects of the kingdom of God. You might as well say that a man must be

* John iii. 8.

† John iii. 4.

twice born into the world, as that a Jew must be twice born into the kingdom of God.”¹

The reply of our Lord is most emphatic and decisive. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,” that is, except a man be baptized and regenerate, “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit:” * as if he had said, A pure and upright nature cannot proceed from a fallen and corrupt nature, and spiritual regeneration cannot be communicated by natural generation; so that, could a man be born again ten thousand times in a literal sense, he would still remain precisely and exactly the same in the sinful principles and tendencies of his nature. But as opposed to the notion that every Jew had been born into the kingdom of God, the reply of our Saviour asserts the insufficiency not only

¹ Every descendant of Abraham was a member of the Jewish church. The initiatory rite was circumcision; and every Jew was circumcised the eighth day, and dedicated to the Lord in the usual manner. This is the connexion with the church of which St. Paul speaks when he describes the strictness of his life as a Jew: “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews.” The Jews rested their hopes of salvation on the grounds of their natural descent; their circumcision; their attention to external rites; and their zeal to make the true God known, and promote his glory and worship in the world.

* John iii. 5, 6.

of Jewish descent, but even of water baptism, apart from spiritual regeneration, to furnish an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He reminded Nicodemus of those lustrations which Gentile proselytes underwent when they were admitted into the Hebrew church, and which many had undergone at the hands of the Baptist, as a confession of their sin, and as a preparation for the advent of the Messiah: but he taught him that unless an inward change be connected with the outward sign,—unless a man be born of the Spirit, as well as of water, “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;” that water which is a mere material element cannot wash away our manifold pollutions, and produce those new tastes, affections, and habits, which are “the fruit of the Spirit.”

Our Lord still further gives us a brief epitome of the whole conversation, and at the same time a most beautiful and appropriate illustration of the mystery, in words admirably fitted to impress. “Marvel not,” do not be startled, astonished, amazed, “that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”* Our Lord here refers us, for an illustration of the subject, to an element with which

* John iii. 7, 8.

we are conversant. Now, if we cannot comprehend the action of the wind, with which we are so familiar, how is it likely that we can comprehend those things which are of a spiritual and more exalted nature? And there are a hundred questions connected with the action of the wind, as, for instance, "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth," which no philosopher in the world can satisfactorily answer. "If men, therefore, hesitate to admit incomprehensible subjects as matters of faith, they cannot be permitted to fly for relief from revelation to philosophy, and much less set up its superior claims, as to clearness of manifestation, to the Holy Scriptures. There, too, it will be seen that mystery and revelation go inseparably together; that he who will not admit the mystery cannot have the benefit of the revelation; and that he who takes the revelation of facts embraces, at the same time, the mystery of their causes." The facts, for instance, of the attraction of gravitation, of cohesion, of electricity, of magnetism, are all admitted; and yet the causes of these phenomena are confessedly hidden. With material substances we are largely acquainted; but the *substratum* of matter, the processes which develop its properties, the laws of these processes, the number of elementary substances, the combinations of which they admit, together with the original quantities and the relative positions of each, are things which elude

the grasp of finite minds. A perfect physical science is altogether impossible; and, after every fresh discovery, we are constrained to acknowledge, "These are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!"

Turning our attention from material things to animated nature, and especially to man, we are encompassed with the same darkness. We live: of this we are conscious; but how the secret springs of life actuate "the earthly house of this tabernacle," we do not know. We see: of this we are conscious; but with the nature of light and the manner of its operations we are imperfectly acquainted. That we possess self-determining and active powers is certain; but the connexion between the volitions of the mind and the actions of the body we cannot trace. There are secrets in the works of God which the wisdom of man will never be able to bring to light; and, in the instances adduced, a dignified reserve is maintained which teaches us, *à priori*,¹ that there are things in the economy of redemption which transcend the human intellect, and acquire from their height and depth the impressive solemnity of mysteries. For if there are secrets in nature and anomalies in providence, is it to be expected that there will be no difficulties in religion?

¹ The argument *à priori* is an argument from cause to effect, from antecedent to consequent, from principle to corollary.

Now to apply this to the case before us: Will the mystery connected with the new birth warrant that base and grovelling unbelief which exclaims on every occasion, "How can these things be?" or will a positive rejection of this truth be justified by the difficulties with which it is clogged? Without the least hesitation we answer the question negatively.

But though the manner of our regeneration is altogether inexplicable, the fact itself is plain and incontrovertible. The one cannot be conceived; the other cannot be questioned. Here also mystery and manifestation go hand in hand. The evidence by which this fact is ascertained and supported is of a two-fold nature:—the direct, which comprises the witness of the Spirit, and the indirect, which embraces the fruit of the Spirit.

The evidence of regeneration arises from the witness of the Spirit. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption; whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."* The testimony of the Holy Spirit is given to the fact of our adoption, and the testimony of our own spirit to the fact of our regeneration; but then both these blessings are bestowed at the same time, and enter into the experience of the same man; so that when a man is adopted

* Romans viii. 15, 16.

into God's family, he is born of God's Spirit. The purport of these remarks is not that the witness of the Spirit is the witness of regeneration in the form of direct testimony, but in the way of undeniable inference. Adoption and regeneration are inseparable, so that when the one is certified, the other *must* be inferred; and not only so, but the Spirit shines upon his work in the heart and life, rendering it so clear to the apprehension, "that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." "How," then I ask, "can these things be?" How am I to know whether I am an adopted child of God, received into his family, and a member of his church? The answer is plain. If this is the case, I shall have a more or less strong persuasion, conviction, or assurance of my adoption and, therefore, regeneration directly and immediately communicated to my heart by the Holy Ghost. It is thus

"The things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason's glimmering ray,
With strong, commanding evidence,
Their heavenly origin display."

The witness of our sonship, certifying that we are the children of God, and, therefore, members of his church, is not an audible voice from heaven; or a visionary and scenic representation, including dreams and visions, whether by day or by night; or any evidence of the divine favour arising from providential

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dispensations; or the result of conjecture, deduction, reasoning, and argumentation; but it is "an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly and immediately witnesses to my Spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

But connected with the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit is the indirect and inferential witness. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."* Hence, like the man who was restored to sight, the regenerate man may say, "This one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." A change is wrought within. All the moral powers undergo an entire renovation. New views, new motives, new desires, new aims, and new objects now occupy the mind. A love of sin is succeeded by a love of righteousness, a hatred of God gives place to an ardent affection towards him, and the whole of our conduct is rendered conformable to the principles of righteousness and holiness. "How," then I ask, "can these things be?" How am I to know whether I am a regenerate child of God, born of his Spirit, and a member of his family? The

* 2 Corinthians i. 12.

answer is obvious. If this is the case, I shall see a correspondence and agreement between my own character and the descriptions of Christian character given in the word of God. The consciousness of regeneration, assuring us that we are born of God, and, therefore, incorporated with his church, is a clear and intuitive perception of the graces of the Holy Spirit in our heart and life, in full cluster, if not in full maturity.

If, therefore, the process of the change indicated by the new birth be too mysterious to be explained, the fact itself is too obvious to be denied. If the former elude the grasp of the most competent and philosophic inquirer, the latter forces itself upon the most cursory and illiterate observer. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof;" the action of the wind on the body is a fact too obvious to be denied; but the manner of its operations, "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth," is altogether inexplicable: "so is every one that is born of the Spirit;" he knows, he is conscious, he feels that a mighty change has taken place; but, as to the manner in which that change has been effected, he knows nothing at all. Here he is involved in the mazes of obscurity and the darkness of uncertainty.

"This is the way" to the kingdom, *taught by our Lord himself*; "walk ye in it." Let your cry be,

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me;” seek until you have obtained the renewal of your souls in the image of God, and never rest until you “have passed from death unto life.”

The entrance into the church *professionally* is by baptism, which is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Every baptized person is nominally a member of the Christian church. The initiatory rite is baptism; and all children should be dedicated to God in this solemn ordinance. But the entrance into the church *really* is by regeneration, which is that mighty change, wrought by the Holy Spirit, by which all the powers and faculties, the tempers and dispositions, the desires and tendencies, the principles and habits of the sinner are transferred from the things of earth, to the things of heaven; from the things of time, to the things of eternity. Every regenerate person is really a member of the Christian church. The confirmatory ordinance is the Lord's Supper; and all repentant and believing men should, “with a glad heart and free,” commemorate the dying love and redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But why is this only way of admission into the church of God called a birth? In this highly figurative and expressive language there is an allusion to

¹ See note I. at the end of the volume.

our natural birth; and regeneration is called a birth, because it resembles in many particulars, and may be illustrated by, our natural birth. As our natural birth introduces us into natural life, in consequence of which we have union with and breathe the air of this world, so our spiritual birth introduces us into spiritual life, in consequence of which we have union and communion with God, and breathe the spirit of prayer and praise. As our natural birth opens our natural senses, and discloses to us natural objects, so our spiritual birth opens our spiritual senses,—the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the feeling sense, and manifests to us spiritual things. As our natural birth prepares us to enjoy natural things,—food to eat, raiment to wear, and a habitation to dwell in, so our spiritual birth prepares us for the enjoyment of spiritual things,—illumination of mind, renovation of heart, manifestations of the divine favour, communications of the divine Spirit, peace and joy through believing, lively hopes of eternal glory, and “fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” As our natural birth introduces us among men, and, partaking of their nature, we soon begin to share in their desires and aversions, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, labours and pursuits, so our spiritual birth introduces us among Christians; and, partaking of their heavenly and divine nature by regeneration, we soon begin to

entertain the same views, manifest the same affections and dispositions, "walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing."¹

Let no one, from the foregoing remarks, ignore justification by faith and adoption into the family of God. These are concomitant blessings; and every regenerate man is justified and adopted. While regeneration involves a change of heart and life, "justification is that act of God's free grace wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the sake of Christ;" and adoption is that gracious act of God, by which we who were alienated, enemies, and disinherited, are made the sons of God, and heirs of his eternal glory. "Justification is a relative, but regeneration is a real change; the former is what God does for us in forgiving our sins, the latter is what he works in us by his Spirit in renewing our hearts." By adoption, also, we obtain the privilege of sons; by regeneration we obtain the nature of sons. By adoption we become relatively the children of God; by regeneration we become really the children of God. Adoption relates us to God as a Father; regeneration stamps upon us the image of a Father. By adoption we are restored to the divine favour; by regeneration we are made partakers of the divine nature. But then, let it be observed, that all these blessings are

¹ See Benson on the New Birth.

imparted at the same time, urged by the same necessity, and derived from the same source, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."* "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."† Justification and adoption may precede regeneration in the order of nature, but not in the order of time; as guilty, alienated, and polluted, we must be justified, adopted, and renewed; and, in all these important respects, Jesus Christ is the author of our salvation. By his atonement he has appeased the wrath of God; by his Spirit he slays the enmity of man; and by his word he has unfolded the way of salvation through faith in his name. Through no other door can we enter into the church of Christ; in no other way can "we have boldness to enter into the holiest of all;" and through no other name can we obtain the remission of our sins, and the redemption of our souls. We must come in the name, and rest upon the merits, of the appointed Mediator. We must approach the throne of God through Jesus Christ. No petition for blessing, no acknowledgment of thanksgiving, no offering of liberality, and no work of obedience can

* Romans iii. 28.

† John i. 12, 13.

be acceptably performed, except through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This transition, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," which gives us a *status* in the church of Christ, and an inheritance with the saints, is always *preceded* by "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Without repentance we can have no personal meetness for mercy, and no inheritance in the kingdom of God. During the period of his personal ministry our Lord declared, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" * and, after his resurrection and ascension, his apostles enjoined, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." † Important, however, as repentance is in every point of view; involving as it does a deep and serious conviction of the fact and danger of our sin, sincere and heartfelt sorrow for sin, a frank and ingenuous confession of sin, a hatred to sin and turning from it, yet it makes no atonement for past transgression of the divine law. As that atonement has been made in the person of Christ, and by the shedding of his blood, faith in him is necessary for the pardon of sin and the purification of the heart. This, indeed, is the turning-point of our salvation; and without faith we can have no interest in

* Luke xiii. 3.

† Acts iii. 19.

Christ, and no preparation for the kingdom of heaven. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." * "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." † Faith, including not only the assent of the mind, but the trust of the heart, imparts the title to heaven, produces the meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and develops the prospect of eternal life; while unbelief shuts the only door of hope, flings back the only gate of salvation, and is the only cause of final perdition.

As there are antecedents, so are there *consequents* of conversion. Love to God, purity of heart and conduct, and a course of practical obedience to the will of God, are the fruit of a regenerate nature. It is when delivered from a spirit of bondage, with which love cannot dwell, admitted into the number of God's children, and the Spirit of adoption is poured upon us, that a love paramount to the love of the world, and, at length, expulsive of it, first arises in the new-born soul. It is then that the heart is brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, and delivered from the tyranny of all other desires. It is then that the soul echoes responsive to the sweet singer of Israel, when he threw off that sentiment which thrilled his heart:

* John vi. 29.

† John iii. 36.

"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."* Deliverance from the bondage of sin, and the power and will to subdue the corruptions of the heart, resist the temptations of Satan, and overcome the allurements of the world, are distinctive marks of a regenerate state. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."† The new birth does not cancel our obligations, and render null and void our future obedience to the law of God; but it involves a principle which is always manifested in obedience to the will of Christ. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."‡ The tree being good, the fruit is good also; the fountain being purified, the streams are pure also; a new heart having been given, new principles and new habits are produced.

But "*who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?*" This is a question which has occupied the best attention, and called forth the best efforts, of men. Legislation, civilization, government, learning, education, the power of example, and the process of gradual mortification have all been tried; and they have all been tried in vain. Laws have been enacted; but they have been disobeyed. Men have been civilized; but they have not been

* Psalm lxxiii. 25.

† 1 John iii. 9.

‡ John xiv. 21.

Christianized. Criminals have been punished; but they have not been reformed. Knowledge has been diffused; but it has not saved. Children have been educated; but they have not been converted. Example has been exhibited; but it has not been imitated. Pains, penances, and mortifications have been imposed; but they have not sanctified. Means and appliances of a social kind have been used; but the plague-spot of sin still remains, the poison of hell still rankles. Social evils exist; impurity, intemperance, and dishonesty threaten the very existence of the social edifice; statesmen, philanthropists, and moralists all deplore these evils which exist in the world and the state of society; but no adequate remedy has been devised and applied, apart from the religion of Jesus. The purification of human nature can only be effected by the faithful preaching of the Gospel, and the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. "The foolishness of preaching" is the means selected and employed by Infinite Wisdom to enlighten and save mankind. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." * But even the ministry of the word will be of no avail without the "power of the Holy Spirit." Perishing sinners may be addressed with all the stores of knowledge, with all the charms of

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

eloquence, with all the soothings of affection, with all the yearnings of pity, with all the vehemence of zeal; and yet all will be in vain, "until the Spirit be poured out from on high." No man can truly repent and believe the Gospel, except under the influences of the Holy Spirit. Without divine grace we cannot perform one good action, or speak one good word, or even conceive one good desire. The slightest inclination to will or power to perform any thing that is good is the gift of God. Sin has obtained a complete ascendancy over us; and it is utterly beyond our power to break the chain and recover our liberty. But God has not left us to ourselves; he has sent his Son to make an atonement for our sins, and he has dispensed his Spirit to renew and sanctify our hearts; and while the sacrifice of the cross meets the case of our guilt, the promise of the Spirit meets the case of our pollution and helplessness. The one relieves us from the penalty of guilt, the other from the power of corruption; the one restores us to God's favour, the other renews us after God's image. The whole of our salvation, indeed, from its first commencement in the communication of free preventing grace to its final consummation in the kingdom of heaven, must be ascribed to the Lord the Spirit. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory,

even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* Without the Spirit of the Lord there could be no transforming impression of the divine image. Without the Spirit of the Lord there could be no continued succession and increase of glory. Without the Spirit of the Lord all the sublime and beautiful scenery would pass before us, and,

"Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wreck behind."

The *basis* of this great truth is the fall of man; it is grounded in the corruption of our nature; and it implies our consequent moral incapacity and unfitness for the fellowship of the saints on earth, and the society, the employments, and the bliss of heaven. This is the point on which the whole question hinges; and if this point cannot be proved, the question must be begged or dismissed. The natural and total depravity of all men, however, is not a matter of doubtful disputation, but is clearly established by the most decisive and satisfactory evidence. Moses, who informs us that "God created man in his own image and after his likeness," soon teaches us that the first man born of a woman "was of the wicked one, and slew his brother;" and that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."† David and

* 2 Corinthians iii. 18.

† Genesis vi. 5.

Solomon represent mankind as coming into the world, not alike indifferent to good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong, but with a vicious and depraved nature. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity," says the Psalmist; "and in sin did my mother conceive me." * "Foolishness," says the wise man, "is bound in the heart of a child." † Isaiah and Jeremiah confirm the testimony of the sacred historian and the royal prophets in the following ingenuous confessions. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." ‡ "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." § But Christ and the apostles, as well as Moses and the prophets, declare men to be the subjects of depravity, as well as guilt; offensive to the holiness, as well as obnoxious to the justice, of God; the children of wrath, and heirs of perdition. "I came not," says our Lord, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." || "The carnal mind," says St. Paul, "is enmity against God." ¶ "The wisdom which descendeth not from above," says St. James, "is earthly, sensual, and devilish." ** "And we know," says St. John, "that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." †† Now how to reconcile these statements of

* Psalm li. 5.

† Proverbs xxii. 15.

‡ Isaiah liii. 6.

§ Jeremiah xvii. 9.

|| Luke v. 32.

¶ Romans viii. 7.

** James iii. 15.

†† 1 John v. 19.

the Word of God with the innocence and dignity of human nature, I am utterly at a loss ; and I would call upon the advocates of this fanciful theory to reconcile them, if they are able.

Matter of fact may be adduced in confirmation of this view. Facts are an important branch of evidence on any subject ; and if we regard men as citizens of the moral world, there are many important facts which prove them to be sinners. The general corruption of manners in all ages and countries ; the prevalence of this wickedness, in spite of all checks and restraints ; the development of evil in the years of infancy and childhood ; the consciousness of all men that there are in them an aversion to good and a proneness to evil, and of good men that there is in them an awful contest between opposite principles and powers,—principles of good, and tendencies to evil ; are facts attested by history and experience. We are called upon to account for these facts upon rational and adequate principles. If bad example and a vicious education cannot account for the facts in question, then reason as well as revelation must ascribe them to a corrupt nature. The tree is corrupt and the fountain is bitter ;—the bad fruit and the bitter stream are the natural and necessary results.

This corruption of our nature is the distilled and concentrated essence of all venom and malignity ; it

is a most loathsome disease; and as such it is placed before us in the Word of God under several most instructive aspects. The disease of sin is hereditary, descending from age to age. It has been transmitted in regular succession from the first guilty pair in Eden's garden down to the present generation. As to the precise manner in which this moral taint is communicated from father to son, we know nothing at all; but the fact rests upon the express testimony of Scripture. "The wicked are estranged from the womb." * "And were φύσει, by nature, the children of wrath." † The plague of sin is universal, pervading the whole man, and all nations and conditions of men in the world. It has filled the understanding with darkness, the will with obstinacy and perverseness, the affections with inordinacy and irregularity, and the whole man with every species of evil. Not only is our moral constitution fatally injured, but utterly ruined; and there is neither spiritual health nor life in us. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." ‡ "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." § There is not a human being in existence who has escaped the taint of original sin. It universally prevails in every nation, and successively extends itself through every period of the world. Men of every age, and of every

* Psalm lviii. 3.

† Ephesians ii. 3.

‡ Isaiah i. 5.

§ Romans vii. 18.

clime ; black and white people ; savage and civilized nations ; Jews, Turks, and Heathens ; whether they live on the banks of the Ganges or the Thames ; whether they starve in the snows of Lapland or burn in the sands of Guinea, are the servants of sin, and the slaves of corruption. The desolating effects of sin reach through all gradations of society from the highest to the lowest ; from the greatest monarch to the meanest subject ; from the imperial palace to the plebeian cottage. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the bond and the free, however they may differ in other things, are all alike in this particular. "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy." * "There is no difference ; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." † The leprosy of sin is dangerous and destructive, issuing in death. It has brought death temporal to the body, and rendered all men subject to pain and dissolution. It has brought death spiritual to the soul, and separated between God and his creatures. It will bring death eternal to body and soul in hell, which is called "the second death." "For the wages of sin is death." ‡ "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." §

How then, we ask, is it possible for men in such

* Psalm xiv. 3.

† Romans iii. 22, 23.

‡ Romans vi. 23.

§ Matthew xxv. 46.

circumstances to enter into the church of God without a process of preparation being wrought in the heart? Let us apply this to the church below. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The church and the world are two societies so distinct, and governed by such opposite principles and maxims, that as well from this contrariety, as the express teaching of Scripture, we conclude that they cannot dwell together in peace and unity. Saints and sinners are the greatest contrast which can be presented to our view; and a church of saints and sinners would be a motley mixture of all sorts of contrarieties,—a heap of contradictions jumbled together. Saints "are light in the Lord;" but sinners "are darkness." Saints are holy; but sinners are unholy. Saints are humble; but sinners are proud. Saints are meek; but sinners are contentious. Saints are loveable and loving; but sinners are "hateful and hating one another." Saints have the mind of Christ; but sinners are at the utmost distance from it. What communion then can there be between light and darkness, holiness and sin, humility and pride, patience and passion, love and hatred, the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world? As soon may you expect to ignore the laws of fitness, cohesion, attraction, and magnetism in the world of matter, as to knit and cement together such opposite and contrary things in the world of mind. The one is a

physical, and the other a moral, impossibility. But we may apply this also to the church above. It is highly probable, even independently of Revelation, that the law of fitness and adaptation governs the heavenly world. To enjoy a picturesque heaven, a man must be endued with a seeing eye; to enjoy a melodious heaven, a man must be endued with a hearing ear; to enjoy an intellectual heaven, a man must be endued with an understanding mind; and to enjoy the actual heaven, "the heaven of heavens," a man must be endued with a new nature. The friendships which we shall share; the exercises in which we shall be engaged; and the happiness which we shall enjoy in heaven; would be altogether unsuited to the tastes and habits of the unregenerate man. Could he mingle with the society of saints and angels, engage in the services of the upper and better sanctuary, and drink at that exhaustless stream of joy which issues from the throne of God? What means his hatred of saints here, if he is to dwell with them for ever? What means his dislike of the service of God in his church on earth, if he is "to serve Him day and night in his holy temple?" What means his distaste for "the joys of holiness below," if he is to relish "the joys of heaven above?" The reciprocal adaptations and mutual fitness of things in the visible universe symbolize and represent the fitness and relations of things in

the invisible world; and as a blind man cannot see the most beautiful objects in nature; as a deaf man cannot hear the most melodious sounds of music; as an ignorant man cannot relish the most exquisite productions of art; and as a sick man cannot feed upon the most costly viands; so "the unrighteous cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" "and without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The principle is founded not in the arbitrary will and pleasure of God, but in the eternal reason and fitness of things.

The fine practical uses to which these views should be applied are too important to be overlooked. From the foregoing reasonings, we may take a lesson of caution, and a lesson of warning.

A lesson of caution. Beware of taking any reformation of manners for the renewal of your hearts; or any outward thing for inward religion; or mere externalism for a new nature. These, however necessary they may be, as the antecedents or consequents of the new birth, are not the new birth itself. It is something which rises infinitely higher, and lies immensely deeper. A man may be baptized, and not be born again. A man may sorrow after a godly sort, and not be born again. A man may believe the Word of God, and not be born again. A man may be upright in his conduct, and not be born

again. A man may attend all the means of grace, and not be born again. Beware, then, of substituting water baptism; transient alarms and a momentary sorrow on account of past sin; speculative notions and a professional belief of the Gospel; mere morality, apart from the principles of righteousness and true holiness; and mere attention to religious ordinances, for the personal and vital enjoyment of the power of godliness; and more especially because when a man once imbibes this most dangerous error, he cries, "Peace, peace, while sudden destruction is at hand." But if a change of heart has taken place, a change of life will necessarily follow, as the evidence and result of the change.

The subject of this chapter suggests *a lesson of admonition*. Of all the subjects that can possibly occupy the attention or interest the feelings of man, the new birth is the most important. It involves our present character and future prospects. It prepares for a dying hour and a judgment-day. It opens the door of admission into the church of God. While, however, it is the one thing needful, it is regarded with careless indifference and thoughtless unconcern. We have heard its nature explained, its causes developed, its consequences enumerated, and its necessity enforced, by arguments fetched down from heaven, and arguments fetched up from hell; and yet, it may be, we are still "dead in trespasses

and sins." Ought not these views to cause a secret horror to creep through our blood; conscience, the scorpion of guilt, to strike his sting into our bosoms; and forebodings equally dark and intolerable, the mysterious presentiments of the wrath to come, to harrow up our souls? If this doctrine is true,—and who can doubt it for a moment?—it is tremendously true. For if a change of heart do not take place, and insure us an admission into the kingdom of heaven, the absence of that change will secure us an admission into the kingdom of hell. If a process of preparation be not wrought in our hearts for the happiness of heaven, a process of preparation will be produced in our souls for the misery of hell.

No words can express, and no imagination can conceive, the awful consequences of living and dying in an unregenerate state. Without a name and place in the church of God on earth, we shall be banished from the presence of God, the glories of his kingdom, and the joys of his right hand. The punishment of loss will be aggravated by the punishment of sense. The understanding, the judgment, the memory, the imagination, the reason, the will, the conscience, the passions and affections, will be employed as instruments of torture. There will be no hope of happiness, or cessation of misery; but remaining, if not increasing, crime, and therefore unmitigated punish-

ment. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." *

Nothing short of a new heart can furnish us with an entrance into the church of Christ, and the kingdom of God. Let no man imagine that he can enter into the church of Christ here without being born again. Let men observe all the forms of the church ; let them attend all the ordinances of grace and the services of the sanctuary ; let them appear in the assemblies of the saints and sing the songs of Zion ; let them hear the grand truths of our holy religion explained, and the great duties of Christian morality enforced ; let them be found in the closet of prayer as well as in the great assembly ; let them go to the altar of God, and commemorate the death of Christ. None of these things puts a man into the church ; and none of these things entitles a man to the privileges and immunities of the Gospel. Let no man imagine that he can enter into the kingdom of God hereafter without being born again. The only principle of admission into the dispensation both of grace and glory is faith and a spiritual birth. The torrent of our corruptions is too mighty to be stemmed by any other means. The depravity of our hearts is so entire that all attempts to mend and new-model must fail. The purity of our morals and

* Matthew xviii. 3.

the uprightness of our conduct may be carried to the highest pitch of excellence ; and yet all this will not supersede the necessity of the new birth. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." *

* Matthew v. 20.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOND OF UNION AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH IS CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

"But above all, thy church and
Spouse doth prove
Not the decrees of power, but bands
Of love.

"But the sweet cement which in one sure bond
Ties the whole frame, is love
And charitie."—GEORGE HERBERT.

"AND now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."* Charity is the pearl of graces because it is a transcript of the divine nature; because it is ampler in its range, and more extensive in its objects and operations, than faith and hope; and because it will survive these graces, exist in the greatest perfection in heaven, and continue, fresh and augmenting, for ever. But holy love is the most precious gem and the most sparkling diamond, because it is the general law of the universe, the bond of union, the magnet of souls, and the attraction of hearts among the followers of Christ.

* 1 Corinthians xiii. 13.

Sentiment or taste ; the relations of life ; a regard for health, reputation, and worldly good, form the bond of union among men. Friendships are founded on kindred tastes and congenial habits. Families are formed by the ties of nature and affection. Societies, communities, and nations are held together by maxims of worldly policy and considerations of temporal advantage. But the church, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone," is knit and cemented together by celestial and heaven-born charity. The church is a purely voluntary association ; and the question often arises, By what mysterious bond or invisible hand are its members united from age to age ? The answer is, The bond is love ; the hand is charity ; and but for this, like the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of olden times, the church would have perished. Union is strength ; and, combined, man builds cities, founds empires, guards by his armies, defends by his bulwarks, and cements by his policy. But, alas for him ! his cities moulder into ruins, his kingdoms rise and fall, his legions are vanquished, his fortresses are captured, and his policy is defeated. Where is Egypt, with her heraldry of science and fame ? Where is mighty Babylon, with her magnificent buildings, her strong fortifications, and her military triumphs ? Where is Greece, once proudly luxuriant in the fruits of

learning and taste? Where is Rome, the mistress of the world, the mistress of arts and sciences, the seat of learning, government, refinement, and religion? These nations and systems of antiquity perished because they were founded on precarious, not on permanent principles. But the church remains fresh, unimpaired, and undecaying for ever, because it is built on an immoveable foundation and united by an imperishable bond.

"There is," indeed, "one faith." Objectively and subjectively considered, the faith of the church is one; and all genuine Christians hold the same head, and walk by the same rule. Notwithstanding the diversity of opinion which unhappily prevails on many minor and non-essential points, yet they "hold fast the form of sound words." "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak."* The leading articles of the Christian religion respect the being and attributes of God; the original and present condition of human nature; the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; the justification of our persons, and the regeneration of our hearts; the resurrection of the body; the immortality of the soul; and a state of future rewards and punishments. These are some of the principal doctrines of the

* 2 Corinthians iv. 13.

Gospel; and every believer holds these as infallibly true and infinitely important. While *in doubtful points there is freedom*, and *in all things charity*, in *essentials there is unity*.

The catholic faith, however, is not a mere creed, or confession, or cold assent; but it is a vital principle, a living thing. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* The faith of God's elect places the God of nature and providence before them in all the majesty of his natural and moral attributes; it brings to light the hidden things of darkness, with respect to the deceitfulness and depravity of the human heart; it beholds the ample provision which has been made for the pardon of sin and the salvation of the sinner; it dispels the darkness of the grave and the gloom of the sepulchre; it brings to light that mysterious condition of being to which we are all hastening; it implies a hearty reliance upon Christ for salvation and a personal apprehension of the merits of his death; it produces a vital union with Christ; it is the means of spiritual regeneration and holiness; it holds the soul in spiritual life, and averts the dangers of spiritual death; it is the vigorous root from which springs every other grace of the Holy

* Galatians ii. 20.

Spirit; and it not only unveils, but substantiates the invisible realities of eternity. This faith is not a mere deduction from premises, or mere assent to a demonstration, or mere credence to a plain proposition; but it is a life-giving, heart-sanctifying, spirit-stirring principle, appealing not merely to the understanding and judgment, but to the affections and feelings of men. One in mind and one in heart, in matters of faith, on all essential points, the church forms a compact body, and presents an impregnable bulwark against infidelity, rationalism, superstition, and every other form of anti-Christ.

"There is," also, "one hope of our calling." The entire church is animated by the same hope, and aiming at the same object, as well as inspired by the same faith, and depending upon the same Word;—having a common hope, as well as a common faith, and "the common salvation." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* Hope in general is the expectation of future good, real or imaginary; and "the hope of our

* 1 Peter i. 3-5.

calling" is the expectation of all necessary good both as to our bodies and souls, our condition in this world, and our prospects for that world which is to come. The hope of the church has respect to "the life that now is;" the pardon of sin and the purification of the heart; the diffusion of the Gospel through all nations, and its perpetuation to future ages and times; the resurrection and transformation of the body; the immortality of humanity, including body and soul; and the enjoyment of eternal happiness in heaven. This is the bright and glorious futurity which opens before the people of God; nor can a man by possibility enter into the possession of this character without being animated by "respect to the recompence of reward."

The hope of the church, however, is not a *beau idéal*,—the capricious scenery of a dream, or the reveries of a wild imagination; but it rests upon the best grounds and is supported by the most solid foundation: "That by two immutable things," the promise and the oath of God, "in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."* The promise of God pledges his faithfulness and truth; and the oath of God pledges the whole collection of his attributes, the entire assemblage of his perfections, to invigorate

* Hebrews vi. 18.

confidence and to excite hope. The eternity, the omnipotence, the omnipresence, the omniscience, and the goodness of God are pledged by his oath; and what ground have we to hope in a Being who can neither expire nor change; who has "stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and spread them forth as a tent to dwell in;" who is present at all times and in all places, dwelling alike through the universe of being and the immensity of space; who is perfectly acquainted with all our wants and desires; and who takes pleasure in the exercise of benevolence, and delights in mercy! Partakers of this blessed hope, and expectants of this sure reward, true believers are one in Christ, burning with the same emotion, and panting after the same object; journeying to the same place, and pressing towards the same goal.

But charity is the indissoluble bond. The Greek word *ἀγάπη*, which our translators have rendered "charity," should have been translated "love." "Charity" denotes not mere almsgiving, but *love*; and it may be considered as it respects God, our Christian brother, and mankind at large. But the point which here claims our especial notice is the manner in which it forms the sweet cement,—the sacred tie which unites all Christians into one catholic church.

The union between Christ and Christian believers, the head and the members, is based upon love; and

to be a follower of Christ is to be a lover of Christ. Love to Christ includes complacency in his character, gratitude for his goodness, and delight in his happiness; and while faith unites us to Christ, love perpetuates our union with Christ. It is not temporary, but abiding. It is not a transient blaze, but a steady and constant flame. It admits of no intermission, and will know no termination. It derives its origin from heaven, and partakes both of the lustre and stability of celestial objects. "It is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness." It maintains its ground, and exhibits its constancy, amidst all the chequered scenes and changing circumstances of life; it flourishes in the shade as well as in the sunshine; it exists in adverse as well as in prosperous circumstances; and ultimately it carries us into eternity, and will run on with immortality.

"Thee will I love, beneath thy frown,
Or smile,—thy sceptre, or thy rod:
What though my flesh and heart decay?
Thee shall I love in endless day!"

It is only sin that can destroy this principle, and separate the soul from Christ. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as

sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." *

The union of Christian believers among themselves, under their head, is founded upon love; and where there is no love, there can be no unity. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." † This is a new commandment because it is founded upon a new principle;—the love of men as brethren in Christ Jesus. The religion of Jesus is a system of universal charity; it views man stripped of all the circumstances of external distinction, whether splendid or sordid; and it regards him simply as the creature of God, the care of his providence, and the purchase of his grace. "But though as Christians we are required to love our fellow-men universally, we cannot love them equally; and we are bound to love our Christian brother with an affection more special than that general good-will which we are to

* Romans viii. 35-39.

† John xiii. 34, 35.

bear to all mankind. That the apostles distinguished between the hallowed and heaven-born principle of brotherly love, and the more common feeling of goodwill to man, is evident from the following passages: 'Honour all men. Love the brotherhood.'* 'As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.'† Now the unity of the church with itself is the unity of affection; brotherly love especially draws kindred souls into the closest union with each other; believers are knit together in love; love is the cement of society; they have no dominion over each other's faith. Compulsion may furnish Roman Catholicism with converts; but in the church of Christ brotherly love is the only principle of attraction and the sole bond of union. Where this prevails, brethren dwell together in unity; and for them the prayer of Christ is answered, 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.' The church of Christ is neither physically nor numerically one; for the members are many; and their judgments, constitutional propensities, intellectual attainments, worldly circumstances, modes of faith, and forms of worship, are amazingly diversified; and yet they are all baptized by one Spirit into one body; and brotherly love, like the vital current in the human frame, circulates

* 1 Peter ii. 17.

† Galatians vi. 10.

through all the members. In the early ages of Christianity, especially, it formed a bond of union more strict and tender than the ties of natural kindred and affection; and with the appellation of 'brethren' they associated all the sentiments of endearment which that relation implied. Hence whenever a man was called out of the world, and brought under the dominion of Christianity, he felt the attractive power of brotherly love; and his heart was drawn by a sweet constraining influence to unite himself to the church."¹ "Let" then "brotherly love continue." Let Christians be of one heart and soul, love as brethren, and cultivate the most fervent charity among themselves. Let them remember that they are branches of the same family, members of the same body, pilgrims on the same journey, and heirs of the same inheritance.

While the basis of Christian union is love, so the end of this union is the edification of the church in the great principle of Christian charity. "Which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* The figure here selected is taken from the human body; and a nobler figure could not have

¹ Treffry.

* Ephesians iv. 15, 16.

been employed. The whole passage contains a beautiful allusion to our natural bodies, composed of different joints and members, knit together by various ligaments, and furnished with vessels of communication from the head and heart to every other part. And the apostle's meaning is, that as the human body is formed by the union of all its members to each other under the head, and by the fitness of each member for its own office and place in the body, so the church is formed by the union of all its members under Christ the head. And farther, as no animal body can have health or growth unless the members thereof continue in union with each other, each performing its office and function in the body, so neither can Christ's mystical body possess spiritual health or growth unless its members cleave to each other in love. But the church is united to itself, as well as united to Christ, that the foundation, the superstructure, and the top-stone of Christian fellowship may be love. Without union the love of the brethren cannot subsist; but with union it is necessarily and inseparably connected. The love of the brethren excludes all envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness; and in proportion as these decline, brotherly love increases.

The spirit and practice of Christian charity, the bond of union and perfectness among the followers of Christ, cannot be maintained inviolate *without sub-*

ordination. The church, though one in fellowship and one in affection, is composed of different members, placed in different situations, endowed with different powers, appointed to different offices; and each ought to employ his gift according to the nature of it for the service of the church. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."* "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?"

* Romans xii. 4-8.


If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”* The offices in the body of Christ are many and various. Some are appointed to superior, and others to inferior, stations. Some are appointed to more honourable, and others to less honourable, offices. Some are appointed to teach, and others to learn. Some are appointed to govern, and others to submit. Some are hewers of wood and drawers of water. It cannot be otherwise. Let us suppose that all were teachers, then where would be our hearers? or that all were hearers, then where would be our teachers? Let us suppose that all were public officers, then where would be our private members? or that all were private members, then where would be our public officers? The unity of the church with itself, it follows, arises from each member keeping his own place, and performing his own office in the body ; and the division and disunion of the church arise from the feet taking the place and performing the office of the hands ; or the hands

* 1 Corinthians xii. 12-21.

taking the place and performing the office of the feet; or the hands and the feet together taking the place and performing the office of the head. *Order* and *union* are kindred principles in the church of God; and in vain do we expect the one without the other. Let then every member of the church "think of himself, not more highly than he ought to think, but soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Widely different, however, have been the spirit and conduct of too many professing Christians in every age. The church has been a house divided against itself. There, where we might have looked for the sepulchre of all the evil passions, we have found their resting-place and their home. This divine institution, which should have been the peace-maker of the world, has waged war against itself, and sought its own destruction. The church has suffered injury from internal division and disunion; and her worst enemies have been her professed friends. In the last prayer which our Lord uttered, in which he expressly includes all who should hereafter believe, he earnestly entreats that they may be one, that the world might be furnished with a convincing evidence of his mission. For some time the object of that prayer was realized, in the harmony which prevailed among Christians, whose religion was a bond of union, because it was a principle of love. The

spouse of Christ, like the mother of a numerous family, exulted over her offspring, who were all equally cherished in her bosom, and grew up at her side. But this unity of the body and harmony of its members were disturbed by the intrusion of false teachers, who made great pretensions to eloquence, wisdom, and knowledge of their Christian liberty; but who had not the humility and gentleness of Christ. The seamless garment of our Saviour was rent, and schism produced among the members of his mystical body; Christian societies were violently agitated, divided into factions, and regarded each other with the jealousies of rival empires; the bond of charity which unites the genuine followers of Christ, in distinction from the world, was dissolved; and the very terms by which it was wont to be described, were exclusively employed to express predilections for a sect. From that time to this, division, disorder, and faction have been perpetuated among the individual members, the different sections, and the whole collective body of the church; and though the central principle of attraction, amidst minor differences, is now in some measure felt and acknowledged, yet it is only the beginning of a better state of things. "The evils which result from this state of division and disunion are incalculable; it supplies infidels with their most plausible topics of invective; hardens the consciences of the irreligious; weakens the hands of the good;



impedes the efficacy of prayer; and is probably the principal obstruction to that ample effusion of the Holy Spirit which is essential to the renovation of the world."

From the foregoing argument for the unity of the church, the following conclusions may be fairly deduced.

Unity is not uniformity. There may be unity in the essentials of faith and hope, the unity of visible relationship, the unity of affection, and unity marked by subordination, of which love is at once the basis and the element, without uniformity of faith and practice. The notion that there must be one visible head of the church, whether Pope or King; and that all the members of the church must render homage, submission, and obedience, either willingly, or by constraint, is unscriptural, and subversive of the principles of liberty and religion.

It is contrary to Scripture. The supreme and exclusive headship of Christ is one of "the first principles of the oracles of God." We are taught that he is not only head above, before, and in preference to all others, but that he is head to the exclusion of all others. It ignores the right of private judgment. Man is a rational creature, capable of distinguishing between truth and error, virtue and vice, obedience to God, and rebellion against his authority. He is accountable for his principles, as well as his conduct;

and, in this respect, he must bear his own burden ;— he must give an account of himself unto God. But to impose upon him a system of faith and a code of morals without the concurrence of, and even contrary to, his judgment, is to denude him of the high and awful capacity with which he is invested, and to deprive him of all responsibility for his belief and conduct. It assumes that the physical and intellectual constitution of all men is the same. If all men are to practise the same rules, and believe the same things, then all men should be fashioned in the same mould, and think, judge, and will in the same way. But there is not a greater diversity in the physical universe, than in the intelligent and moral world ; and as soon may you expect to find the trees of the forest, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, formed and fashioned alike, as to find the apprehensions, conclusions, and volitions of all men stereotyped in the same forms and combinations. Variety and uniformity, under endlessly diversified manifestations, pervade the world of matter and mind. It involves persecution. Uniformity cannot be obtained without coercion ; coercion cannot be employed without persecution ; and where persecution begins, Christianity ends. Our Lord never used force and violence but in one case ; and it was to drive men out of the temple, not to bring them in. It brings in its train insincerity,

hypocrisy, and schism. To compel men, either by motives of interest, or enactments of law, or the infliction of punishment, to repeat creeds which they do not believe, to observe rites and ceremonies which they abhor, and to render contributions of property which they would withhold, will make them dissembles, hypocrites, and schismatics, but cannot make them Christians.

Churches based upon this principle, and involving these results, have within them the elements of decay and dissolution. Of this we have two signal examples in the history of the church. Popery is on the wane. "Upon the church of Rome, most conspicuously, have come the many loathsome infirmities which usually attend the close of a dissolute life. She who once lived deliciously, and courted Kings to her couch, is now mocked, and spurned, and hated in her wrinkles. Every ear into which she would whisper an obsequious petition, is averted from the steam of her corrupted breath! The Greek church is not an exception; but if we affirmed that second childhood had come upon it, we should plainly err; for childishness has been its character even from its youth up. The offspring of a decrepit power, it has known nothing, during its long life of fourteen centuries, but inanity; it has cared for nothing but toys."¹

The absence of brotherly affection, among the pro-

¹ Isaac Taylor.

fessed followers of Christ, *destroys the unity and impairs the efficiency of the church.* The church may have a form of sound words; a splendid and impressive ceremonial; a pure and efficient ministry; the external advantages of wealth and power, without charity: and without charity, there will not only be differences of judgment, but alienations of affection, the prejudices of party, and every evil work. As there can be no peace, so there can be no prosperity, where there is no charity. The love of the brethren is the badge of our discipleship; and never does religion present a fairer form, or address itself with more subduing energy to the hearts of men, than when it is seen as the bond of union among the followers of Christ. Let Christians "love one another;" let them be of one heart and soul; let them exhibit a strong regard for each other's interests and welfare; and then even the enemies of religion will not be able to withhold the homage of their respect and approbation, and multitudes will be converted from the error of their way. But let Christians exhibit a captious and contentious spirit; let them bite and devour each other; let them injure one another in character or business; and as soon may you expect to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles, as witness the furtherance of the Gospel in the world. The absence of brotherly affection prevents also that union of Christian effort, which is one of the chief means of religious prosperity. A

united church is always a working church; but where there are divisions of heart, and parties springing from them, there cannot be united counsel, united prayer, and united exertion.

The eloquent eulogy of the Psalmist, on the unity of the church, may form an appropriate conclusion of this chapter. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." *

* Psalm cxxxiii.

CHAPTER VI.

VISIBLE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CHURCH IS THE
DUTY OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS AND REPENTANT
SINNERS.

"THE modern notion, that we may be saved at last just as well out of a church as in one, is as dangerous as it is novel. I cannot trace it back much beyond a century; and I am quite sure it has nothing to support it in the Bible."—DANIEL ISAAC.

"VISIBLE fellowship with the church is the duty of all who profess faith in Christ; for in this, in part, consists that confession of Christ before men, on which so much stress is laid in the discourses of our Lord."—RICHARD WATSON.

PERHAPS no question is of greater importance to us than, Who ought to be received into the church of God? and this question must be answered before the duty of church fellowship is argued. The characters privileged, or the persons upon whom this duty devolves, are described in brief, but most emphatic terms, in Acts ii. 47: "And the Lord added to the church daily τοὺς σωζομένους, such as should be saved." On this most important passage there has been a great variety of opinion; and the controversy has resolved itself into one of grammar and criticism.

The τοὺς σωζομένους of the apostolic church are to be regarded as model members of the Christian

church to the end of time. The Greek word *σωζο-
μενους* is the present participle, in a middle sense,
of the verb *σώζω*, "to save;" and it means "the
saved," or "those who were in the way of salva-
tion;"—"the saved" denoting believers, and "those
who were in the way of being saved," penitents.
Some, farther advanced than the rest, were actually
saved; and others were near to the kingdom, on
the very threshold of salvation. It cannot for a
moment be imagined that they were all precisely in
the same state of grace, though they were all inspired
with the same desire, and thirsting after the same
blessing. The primitive church was thus made up
of believers and penitents; and unbelieving and im-
penitent sinners were not admitted within its sacred
enclosure.

This rendering has been sanctioned by the highest
authorities. "*Τους σωζομένους*," says Dr. Alford,
" 'those who were in the way of salvation: ' compare
σώθητε, verse 40: 'those who were being saved.'
Nothing is implied by this word, to answer one way
or the other the question, whether all these *were*
finally saved. It is only asserted that they were in
the way of salvation when they were added to the
Christian assembly. Doubtless, some of them might
have been of the class alluded to, Hebrews x. 26, 29 :
at least there is nothing in this word to preclude it."

"*Τους σωζομένους*—present participle in a middle

sense," says Dr. Wordsworth; "and it designates those who were escaping (as it were) from the Flood, and taking refuge in the Ark, the church; those who were flying from the bondage of a spiritual Egypt, and were entering on the way of salvation toward the land of promise; those who were being delivered from the death of sin, by incorporation into the *σωτήριον σῶμα τοῦ σωτήρος*. (Ephesians v. 23.) Calvinism has made great use of this text, and important consequences have been deduced from it. But the phrase of the original is *τοὺς σωζομένους*, where the *tense employed* shews that the expression applies only to those who are in a state of salvation, as *τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις* (1 Corinthians i. 18) applies to the opposite; discouraging the Calvinistic interpretation."

"It is remarkable," says Professor Blunt, "that the tense used (*viz.*, the present) is the only tense which excludes the Calvinistic interpretation: both the future (*σωθησομένους*) and the past (*σεσωσμένους*) would have favoured it."

"*Προσετίθει τοὺς σωζομένους*. On the exact sense of these words," Dr. Bloomfield remarks, "considerable difference of opinion exists. Our authorized Version renders, 'those that should be saved;' but it is now almost universally agreed that this mode of rendering cannot be admitted, since it would require, not *σωζομένους*, but *σωθησομένους*. The version in question must therefore be rejected, not (as Wetstein

thinks) because it introduces a Calvinistic doctrine, but because such a sense cannot be shown to be inherent in the words. The sense '*had* been saved,' which some anti-Calvinistic commentators propose, is equally inadmissible. If we keep close to the propriety of the language, (which, where a *doctrine* is concerned, we are bound to do,) we cannot, I think, translate better than (as Doddridge and Wesley do) 'the saved,' meaning 'those who were being saved;' which is supported by the authority of the Pesch.-Syriac Version. The expression must of course denote those who *hearkened* to the earnest injunction, verse 40, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation,' namely, by withdrawing from community with them, renouncing Judaism, seeking admission into the Christian church by baptism, and thus being put into a *state* of salvation; whereby, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, imparted under the Gospel, they might be *actually* saved both from the guilt and the power of sin. See Dr. A. Clarke, and Dr. Hales."

The context, which more particularly describes those who were added to the church on the day of Pentecost, may be adduced in support of this rendering. "Now when they heard this, they were *pricked in their heart*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, *what shall we do?*" * "Then they that *gladly received his word* were bap-

* Acts ii. 37.

tized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."† In this number were included many anxious inquirers, who were in the way to the kingdom, and many earnest believers, who were in a state of salvation.

But who are believers, or the saved; and penitents, or those who are fleeing from the wrath to come? A believer in Christ is one who admits his claims as the promised Messiah; receives his doctrine as the Great Teacher; trusts in his atonement as the only Saviour; and obeys his commandments as the Supreme Lawgiver. A penitent is one who is deeply and seriously convinced of the fact and danger of his sin; who is heartily sorry on account of his sin; who sincerely, personally, ingenuously, and fully confesses his sin; and who connects with sincere sorrow on account of sin a hatred to it, and turning from it to the living and true God. Now while it is admitted on all hands, that *believers are members of the mystical body of Christ*, it ought not to be questioned that *penitents should be members of the visible church of God*. The doctrine of Scripture, as to believers, may be thus summed up: "He that believeth on him is not condemned." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and thou shalt be saved." The teaching of Scripture, as to penitents, is thus expressed: "And were baptized of him in Jordan;

* Acts ii. 41.

confessing their sins." * "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." † "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ,"—baptism being the authorized form of initiation into the church and covenant of God, both in the case of infants and adults—"for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." ‡

Baptism was the appointed form of admission into the visible church; and it was administered to penitents as well as believers. Of this we have a striking instance in the case of Simon Magus,—the sorcerer. "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." § Simon

* Matthew iii. 6. † Matthew v. 3. ‡ Acts ii. 38.

§ Acts viii. 9-13.

believed, but he was not saved. He admitted the truth of the Gospel, but he was a stranger to its power. He was baptized, but he was not converted. *He was admitted into the church, but he had not received the Holy Ghost.* "For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." * The twelve disciples at Ephesus furnish us with a remarkable example. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" † was the question of the apostle. "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," was the answer of the disciples. "Unto what then were ye baptized?" inquired the apostle. "Unto John's baptism," rejoined the disciples. The twelve disciples had been received into the church by the baptism of repentance; but they had not received the gift of the Holy Ghost by faith; they had believed, but their faith was not justifying; they were repentant sinners, but not true believers. But *after their admission into the church*, they believed in Christ with the heart, "and the Holy Ghost came on them." Baptism was administered to adults, as well as infants, in the early ages of the church, for the most obvious of all reasons: Christianity had only just been introduced, and, therefore, adults who embraced it were baptized, because they had not been baptized in infancy.

* Acts viii. 16.

† Acts xix. 1, 7.

The character of communicants is thus sketched in the Communion Service of the Church of England: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort." The venerable Founder of Wesleyan Methodism also held repentance to be a sufficient pre-requisite for church fellowship, and required of those who desired admission into the church only "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins," manifested by a careful abstinence from every species of evil, and a diligent use of all the appointed means of grace.

This is the only condition previously required in those who seek to be admitted into the Wesleyan Church.¹ But, regarding the Lord's Supper also as a test of membership, Mr. Wesley has this remarkable passage in his Journal: "In the ancient church, every one who was baptized communicated daily. So in the Acts we read, they 'all continued daily in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.'

"But in later times many have affirmed, that the Lord's Supper is not a converting, but a confirming ordinance.

¹ Rules of Society.

“And among us it has been diligently taught, that none but those who are converted, who have received the Holy Ghost, who are believers in the full sense, ought to communicate.

“But experience shews the gross falsehood of that assertion, that the Lord’s Supper is not a converting ordinance. Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep conviction) was wrought at the Lord’s Supper. Now, one single instance of this kind overthrows the whole assertion.

“The falsehood of the other assertion appears both from Scripture precept and example. Our Lord commanded those very men who were then unconverted, who had not yet received the Holy Ghost, who (in the full sense of the word) were not believers, to do this ‘in remembrance of him.’ Here the precept is clear. And to these he delivered the elements with his own hands. Here is example equally indisputable.”

There are other Evangelical churches, however, who admit believers, and exclude penitents. But the difference, on this point, is more in words than things, because what we describe as signs of repentance, they regard as distinctive marks of a state of grace; and what we believe to be connected with

¹ Journal, vol. i., p. 279.

faith, the special and direct witness of the Holy Spirit, and, sooner or later, the perfect love of God, they consider cannot be attained in the present life.

Assuming, then, believers and penitents to be the proper candidates for membership with the church of Christ, we maintain that Christian communion is not a question of choice, or matter of expediency, but of imperative obligation. This is a point which can only be decided by an appeal to the Word of God. The authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice is supreme and absolute;—the Word of God teaching us authoritatively all that it is necessary for us to know, and to do. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.”† “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.”

“What,” then, “saith the Scripture?” What is the mind of the Spirit? What are the principles laid down in the Word of God? What are the inferences to be deduced from these principles? What is the teaching of Scripture, as plainly expressed or clearly implied? To these questions I must now invoke the earnest and prayerful attention

* 2 Timothy iii. 16.

† 2 Peter i. 20.

of the reader. The subject deserves our most careful consideration ; and it is one which cannot, though imperfectly treated, be considered without great practical effect. May the Holy Spirit assist us !

“ What in us is dark,
Illumine ; what is low, raise and support ! ”

The passages of Scripture which have a direct and immediate bearing on the question at issue, are so rich and comprehensive, that it is difficult to select : they contain invitations, experience, promises, warnings, commands, and exhortations ; and it is worthy of especial remark, that all Scripture, on points of moral obligation and duty, whether under the form of invitation, narrative, promise, warning, command, or exhortation, is not mere advice or counsel, but emphatically *law*, enforced by the awful sanctions of eternal life and death. Let us then particularize a little, beginning with “ Moses and the prophets.”

The invitation addressed by Moses to Hobab, “ the son of Raguel, the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law,” may be adduced in proof that fellowship with the people of God is not a vain thing. “ We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you : come thou with us, and we will do thee good : for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” * At the period of the sacred history before us, the Israelites were at the com-

* Numbers x. 29.

mencement of a journey connected with the most important proceedings and results. After their departure from Egypt they travelled on towards the land of Canaan :—a land which had so long been a land of promise to their ancestors, and the very prospect of inheriting which had kindled the warmest and most joyous emotions in every bosom. Now all this was “a shadow of good things to come,” of which the Gospel is the appropriate substance. The deliverance which the Israelites had obtained from the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, was an eminent and illustrious type of the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ ; their journey through the wilderness to the land of Canaan represented our pilgrimage through the present world to an inheritance in heaven ; and the land of Canaan, fair and attractive as it was, faintly shadowed forth “the rest which remaineth for the people of God.” The same invitation, therefore, which was addressed by Moses to his father-in-law, is addressed by the Holy Ghost to us and to all into whose hands these divine oracles come ; and should be urged by us upon others. We are invited to join the people of God,—the people of his choice, and the people of his hand ; we are taught that those who wish to enjoy the heavenly inheritance must walk in the way towards it, and associate with the people who are journeying that way ; we are assured

that such association is not only good in itself, but good for us; and we are urged to this conduct by a reference to the promises of God. Temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings are the subjects of promise; and the promises of God are all yea and amen to his people.

"Actions speak louder than words;" and the course which Moses recommended to others, he adopted himself. Communion with the people of God, and fellowship with their sufferings, were preferred by him to the brightest glories and the richest rewards which this world has to bestow. Nor was his choice the result of sudden impulse or momentary enthusiasm, but of cool deliberation and settled purpose. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt."* The sacrifices involved were the pleasures of sin, and the treasures of Egypt. The pleasures of sin are many; their attractions are powerful to the appetites of our carnal nature; and their fascinations are multiform and widely seductive; but they are transient. The treasures of Egypt included the prestige of her name, the fertility of her

* Hebrews xi. 24, 25.

soil, the wisdom of her statesmen, the number of her armies, the extent of her resources, the vastness of her territories, and the heraldry of her arts, sciences, architecture, and hieroglyphics. The privations and sufferings endured were the affliction of the people of God, and the reproach of Christ. The condition of the Israelites, both before and after their Exodus from Egypt, was an afflicted condition ; and reproach for righteousness' sake has always been the lot of the people of God. But grasping with a mighty mind the whole question ; penetrating with an eagle eye everything connected with it ; comparing, on the one hand, the gain of the world with the loss of the soul, the smile of men with the frown of God, the pleasures of earth with the pains of perdition, and the momentary enjoyments of time with the endless remorse of eternity ; and contrasting, on the other, the sorrows of earth with the joys of heaven, the sufferings of the present state with " the glory which shall be revealed in us," Moses chose God for his portion, and the people of God for his companions. In Egypt, he might have had communion with her princes, her statesmen, her philosophers, and her artists ; but they were of the world, and intercourse with them would have been very different in its effects from fellowship with the devout worshippers of God. One would have tended to produce hardness of heart and a worldly spirit, and the other to elevate and

purify the mind, and prepare it for God and heaven.

This singular, but wise and happy choice of Moses is placed before us not merely for our admiration, but imitation; and it has all the force of moral obligation. "Be followers," that is, imitators, "of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." * We ought to imitate the example and tread in the footsteps of Moses. There should be no halting and hesitating between God and mammon, things seen and things unseen,—earth and heaven. We should "walk by faith, not by sight;" "endure as seeing him who is invisible;" and have "respect unto the recompence of the reward." We ought, especially, first to give ourselves to the Lord, and then to his people; first to be united to Christ, and then to his church; and to say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

The conduct of David, the Shepherd-King of Israel, exemplified the choice of Moses. The Psalmist had tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord; and the sacred fire of grateful love, enclosed in his heart, expanded itself within, until at length it broke forth with impetuosity, in words admirably calculated to kindle the flame in others. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." † The experience of the

* Hebrews vi. 12.

† Psalm lxi. 16.

Psalmist was wonderful and instructive; and all the facts and incidents connected with it are remarkable and surpassing in their sublimity. From an humble shepherd, he became a mighty monarch, without the least tincture of pride, disdain, or envy. He was experienced in all the vicissitudes of joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, elevation and depression, health and sickness; and yet he was equal to them all. But experiences were realized, spiritual, deeper, more heart-stirring, including repentance, faith, conversion, communion with God, the lofty exultations of hope, and the tranquil ecstasies of devotion. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." * The life of David, from first to last, is full of interest and instruction; and teaches much that should direct and inspire the people of God in every age of the world. "In youth he was a hero; in manhood a monarch; and in age a saint." The story of his experience he proposes to tell to the saints of the Most High; he often refers with eagerness and delight to the dealings of God with his soul; he utters high and rapturous rejoicings; and his Psalms stand in illustrious and cheering contrast with the vicious and chilling speculations of men, which teach us that religion is a thing to be experienced, but not described; a thing to be

* Psalm cxvi. 7, 8.

kept to ourselves, but not talked about to others. Though religion may vary as to its modes and circumstances, at different times, yet in its great essential principles it is always the same; and one of the first instincts of a pardoned and regenerate man is to tell to others the way along which he has been led, the deliverance which has been wrought for him, and the happiness to which he has been introduced. The religion of Jesus, wherever it has been enjoyed, in ancient and modern times, has expressed itself not only in deeds, but in words; not only in humility, gentleness, benevolence, and a readiness to every good work, but in social intercourse, "speech always with grace," "speaking unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

Habitual or frequent intercourse with one another, maintained through the medium of speech or language, was the practice of the Old-Testament saints; and it attracted the attention of the Divine ear, and insured a future recompense of reward. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." * The fear of God is not slavish passion, but filial affection;

* Malachi iii. 16, 17.

not a dread of his wrath, and an apprehension of punishment, but a fear of offending him, with a persuasion of our conditional liability to his displeasure. Inspired with this principle, the saints of old, not occasionally, but habitually, spake one to another ; not merely while labouring in the fields, transacting business in their shops, and pursuing their daily avocations, but at the temple, in the synagogue, and at meetings specially convened for religious conversation and prayer. The subjects of their converse would be not arts and sciences, trade and commerce, passing events and occurrences, but the deep things of God, and the interior exercises of the mind on spiritual subjects ;—they would tell of their doubts and fears, their joys and sorrows, their trials and success. Of these conversations we have many examples in the sacred writings. “ And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not : for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee ; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee ; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the Lord : and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.”* “ And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him : and he saluted him, and said to him, Is

* 1 Samuel xxiii. 16–18.

thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.”* “And they talked together of all these things which had happened.”† “And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”‡ The sanction and issue of this practice render it binding upon all who seek the divine favour. Those who feared God kept up the communion of saints, and by mutual exhortation strengthened each other’s hands in the Lord; and their conduct, in this particular, was noticed and remembered by God for good, and a difference was to be discerned between them and others at that day when the jewels, which are to sparkle in the crown of the Redeemer, and the mansions of the redeemed, shall be finally chosen.

Turning from “Moses and the prophets” to Christ and the apostles, and from the Jewish to the Christian church, we find that the teaching of Scrip-

* 2 Kings x. 15.

† Luke xxiv. 14.

‡ Acts i. 13, 14.

ture, on this, as on all other subjects, presents one beautiful, consistent, and harmonious whole. The promise, the command, and the prayer of Christ must take the precedence of all other considerations ; and if it can be shown that fellowship one with another is exhibited as a privilege, commanded as a duty, and implored as a blessing by our Lord himself, the question is settled beyond all-dispute.

Reflect upon *the promise of Christ*. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." * To be *συνηγμένοι*, "gathered together," in the name of Christ, is only another form of expression for that open avowal and public profession of the Gospel, for which the church has been called into existence and continued to the present time. It denotes an assembly of Christians, not only meeting for religious worship, but united together in church fellowship. The church or congregation may be small, consisting of two or three ; but still, if they be sincere and spiritual worshippers, they will have the presence of Christ. Wherever *they exist* as a church, and wherever *they meet* as a church, whether in the open field, the desert waste, the dingy barn, the noisome dungeon, or the stately edifice ; by the shore of the sounding sea, in the depths of the forest, under the spacious firmament of heaven, or in the vaulted cathedral ; Christ will be in the

* Matthew xviii. 20.

midst of them, confirming their faith, reviving their hope, and perfecting their love. Such a gathering and such a promise exhibit Christian communion as a privilege eagerly to be coveted.

Observe *the command of Christ*, addressed under peculiarly solemn and affecting circumstances. "This do in remembrance of me." * The Eucharist or the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ himself; and it has several distinguishing characters. It is a memorial of his death, a symbol of his atonement, a means of grace, an acknowledgment of gratitude, a pledge of fidelity, and the test of communion. It is *commemorative*, putting us in remembrance of the death of Christ as an historical fact, supported by clear and indubitable testimony. It is *symbolical*, setting forth by signs, what at other times we are taught by words, the death of Christ as an atonement for the sins of the world, and as the only means of salvation to mankind.¹ It is *federal*, ratifying, in its first institution, the covenant of grace with true believers; and renewing, in every subsequent celebration, the assurance of the love of God to his people, and guaranteeing all the blessings of the covenant on their fulfilling the conditions of the covenant. It is *eucharistic*, because it implies a thankful acknowledgment of the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

* Luke xxii. 19.

¹ See Note II. at the end of this volume.

It is *sacramental*, because it is that sacred ceremony or religious act, by which, with befitting circumstantial solemnity, we pledge ourselves to fidelity and devotedness to Christ. It is *the Communion*, because it sets forth our communion with Christ, the head of the church, and our fellowship with the church, the body of Christ. This most solemn and impressive ordinance was instituted by Christ when he was about to pour out his soul as an offering for sin, and leave his sorrowing disciples to be dispersed and scattered abroad, which circumstances invest it with additional solemnity and impressiveness: and it is worthy of especial notice, that its observance is not merely *advised* and *recommended*, but *commanded*; so that it cannot be neglected without incurring the displeasure of our Lord, and placing the interests of our immortal souls in the last extremity of peril.

Consider *the prayer of Christ* for his church throughout the world. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* The absurdity of praying for that which is unattainable, or useless and unnecessary, is universally admitted. It is true, indeed, that we may through ignorance, or mistaken notions, ask for those

* John xvii. 20, 21.

things which God is not willing to impart, or for those things which would be useless, if not positively injurious; and our prayers, therefore, do not prove that these things are attainable, or that, if attained, they would be a good and not an evil. But this cannot apply to the prayers of our blessed Lord. And what is that, which Christ here asks on behalf of his followers? The greatest blessings,—that they may *be one, and one in the same way, and after the same manner as the Father and the Son are one*; that as a *model of holy unanimity* they might image forth, in a faint and shadowy manner, the sublime and incomprehensible mystery of the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity, and also constrain the world to acknowledge that the undertaking of Christ had the sanction of his heavenly Father. But how is this prayer to be answered, and how are these ends to be accomplished, if the church is to consist of separate parts and broken fragments, rather than of one beautiful whole?

Collect these things together; reflect upon the promise, observe the command, and consider the prayer of Christ; carefully weigh these things, and then say, whether fellowship with the church can be practised without benefit, or neglected with impunity, or “made light of” without the most flagrant and insolent outrage against the Son of God.

It may be affirmed *à priori*, that the teaching

of Christ on Christian communion will be confirmed by the testimony of the apostles. Now it must be admitted, that a single passage of Scripture, clearly apprehended and thoroughly understood, is sufficient to establish any doctrine of religion or duty of morality. A multitude of passages on the same point cannot add to the truth contained in a single passage; but still concurrent testimony may corroborate the evidence, and remove any doubt and uncertainty as to the interpretation. With this view let us consider the conclusions to be deduced from the writings of the apostles.

“The right hand of fellowship,” and “fellowship one with another,” are phrases of frequent recurrence, and full of significance. “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”* “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”† Fellowship, in general, is intercourse in the common walks of life; and the fellowship of Christians, in particular, is intercourse with the church. Knowledge, access, a similitude of manners, an entire confidence and love, are necessary to the cultivation of this habit; and these things cannot be attained without the union

* Galatians ii. 9.

† 1 John i. 7.

of Christian believers among themselves. This union is the basis of Christian fellowship, and without it the pre-requisites of this holy communion cannot be possessed.

Social meetings for instruction, admonition, thanksgiving, comfort, edification, and mutual exhortation, are recommended and enjoined. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."† "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."‡ "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."§ This supposes a state of close church fellowship, without which the primitive Christians could not have had access to each other. Without this, instruction and admonition could not have been administered; there could have been no pouring forth the heart in devotion and praise in concert; there could have been no speaking to each other to comfort and edification; and there could have been no word of exhortation

* Colossians iii. 16.

† 1 Thessalonians v. 11.

‡ Hebrews iii. 13.

§ Hebrews x. 25.

daily addressed, to prevent hardness of heart through the disguises and excuses of sin. The allusion is to *private* rather than to *public* meetings for the preservation and building up of the church. The church was in a state of persecution; and therefore social meetings only could be held. It would seem that some, under the influence of fear, had deserted these means of grace, and that others were in danger of following their example.

Incorporation into the Christian, in opposition to and contradistinction from the Jewish, church, involves the most inestimable privileges. "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."* This is a description of the glories of the Christian dispensation, rather than the glories of the heavenly world. Zion was a type of the church of God; and Jerusalem, the city of God, was a type of the "Jerusalem which is the mother of us all." "The innumerable company of angels" are not confined to their own celestial mansion, but deeply interested in the service

* Hebrews xii. 22, 24.

and glory of the Redeemer. "They announced the birth of Christ with exulting strains; they ministered to him in the scenes of his temptation, his agony, and his burial; they cheered his apostles with the first tidings of his resurrection; and even after his ascension, they still lingered, with a compassionate concern, among his sorrowing disciples, and assured them of his final return." It is not impossible that these glorious beings are in some respects involved in the blessings of that stupendous plan, by which "things in heaven" are gathered together with "things on earth." Angels may probably be *secured* in that glory to which saints are *promoted* through the mediation of Jesus Christ. "The general assembly and church of the first-born" are the early churches, the first-fruits of Christianity, the pledge of the final harvest. "The Judge of all" is the sovereign ruler of the church, who admits and excludes, justifies and condemns, rewards and punishes, not according to his arbitrary pleasure, but according to the principles of justice and grace; and "the spirits of just men made perfect" are adult Christians, as opposed to babes in Christ. "The Mediator of the new covenant" is Jesus Christ, by whom the covenant of grace has been ratified, confirmed, and established; and "the blood of sprinkling" is not the blood of the sin-offerings, which was carried into the holy of holies by the

high priest once every year, and sprinkled in due form before the mercy-seat, but it is the precious blood of Christ, which was shed upon the cross and is applied to the conscience. Such are the superior privileges of the Gospel church; and to "come," *προσελλύθατε*, to this highly privileged church is to share its membership, and enjoy its advantages.

The practice of social confession and united prayer is strictly enjoined upon us; and this cannot be done without the communion of saints. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." * The confession of sin, indeed, is to be made, primarily, not to man, but to God. This confession must be sincere, personal, ingenuous, and full. It must have respect to the supreme right of the Lawgiver; the purity and excellency of the law given; and the justice of the penalty denounced, in the word of God, against the transgressor of the law. The sins of others are too generally known and acknowledged by us; we have a wonderful facility in pointing out the faults of our neighbours; but we must confess our own sins. There must be no painting, varnishing, and palliating sin; but it must be confessed in its native deformity, and in all the aggravating circumstances with which it has been connected. It is not sufficient that we

* James v. 16.

confess one or two of our most atrocious crimes; but we must confess the whole course and series of our sins. This confession must be connected with an unfeigned aversion to sin, a firm determination to forsake it, and humble and earnest applications to God for pardon and salvation. But the confession of sin must be made, secondarily, to our fellow-Christians. This confession, however, is not auricular, but social; and it is to be made, not to the priest, but to the people. If we have sinned against God, we must confess the sin, that we may be humbled before man as well as God, and that we may be admonished and advised. If we have sinned against our Christian brother, we must acknowledge the offence, that we may be forgiven and comforted. With confession must be connected mutual prayer, not only in the closet, but in the Christian assembly. The performance of these duties is based upon the assumption that there is a church in the world, and that we sustain the most intimate and confidential relations to that church. We cannot confess our faults to the church, and pray for the church, unless our own interests and happiness are most closely identified with the interests and happiness of the church.

To these may be added all those passages, so numerous in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which represent the church as the

Assembly of the Saints ; the City of the Living God ; the Congregation of the Saints ; the Family in Heaven and Earth ; the Flock of God, and the Fold of Christ ; the Heritage of the Lord, and the Habitation of God ; the House of Christ, and the Household of God ; an Inheritance, and the Lot of God's Inheritance ; Mount Zion, and the Mountain of the Lord's House ; the Sanctuary of God, and the Tabernacle of the Lord ; the Temple of God, and the Temple of the Living God ; and those passages also which express love to Zion and admiration of the beauty of holiness, sincere sorrow in the time of her calamity, pious exultation in the day of her prosperity, unwearied exertions to promote her welfare, delight in the converse and society of God's people, the family affection of Christianity, and the relations of the church to the world. All these passages are perfectly consistent with humility, self-diffidence, the love of retirement, family religion, and closet religion, and religion considered as a personal thing and an individual concern ; but they are altogether irreconcilable with our keeping at a distance from the church of God, an habitual neglect of Christian communion, and absence from the social means of grace.

Fellowship with the church, whether Patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian, *is taught not only by precept, but by example.* It is not only exhibited in principle,

but embodied in action. All practical duties are best taught by example. Precept may define their nature, urge their obligations, and recount their advantages ; but example arrays them in a living form, and gives an irresistible authority to all their claims. This remark eminently applies to the communion of saints, which has been sought and enjoyed by good men in every age. Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs have all walked with God, "taken sweet counsel together," and gone up to "the house of God in company." There was Enoch, "the seventh from Adam," who "walked with God : and he was not ; for God took him ;" who prophesied of the coming of the Lord ; and who doubtless communed with Adam and Eve, after their restoration to the favour of heaven, and with other members of the earliest church. There was Noah, who was "a just man and upright in his generation ;" who was "a preacher of righteousness ;" and who had a church in his house, at a period when the springs of domestic life were poisoned, the sacred ties of relationship violated, and every species of impiety and moral corruption prevailed. There was Abraham, "the father of the faithful" and the pattern of believers, who was a stranger and an alien ; but who left his country and kindred, that he might raise up a godly seed, become the founder of a church, and a witness for Jehovah. There was Moses, who

identified his interests and fortunes with the interests and fortunes of the church, resigning the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt, suffering affliction with the people of God, and bearing the reproach of Christ. There was Jonathan, Saul's son, who "went into the wilderness of Ziph to David, and strengthened his hand in God;" who was united to David by a love which was stronger than death; and who sought communion with him when exposed to the hatred and persecution of Saul. There was David, whose delight was in "the saints and excellent of the earth;" who was a "companion of all them that feared the Lord, and kept his precepts;" and whose divine songs breathe strong desires, ardent longings, and eager aspirations after the house of God and the assembly of the saints.

The Christian church also has been the centre in which all hearts have met,—the point towards which all minds have verged under the Evangelical dispensation. There were the twelve apostles, who, forsaking all and following Christ, became not only members, but founders, of a church, which is perpetual, which will rise upon the ruins of all other dominions, and which will itself never be subverted. There were the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, who, under the preaching of St. Peter and the power of the Holy Ghost, "were pricked in their heart;" who inquired, with trembling and fervent solicitude,

"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and who "were added to the church." There was the Ethiopian eunuch, "a man of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship;" who on his return read Isaiah the prophet; who was instructed by Philip in the things of God; and who believed and was baptized,—admitted into the church of Christ. There was Saul of Tarsus, who, under the impulse of the conviction struck into his mind, and the dazzling brightness which fell upon his eyes on his way to Damascus, exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" who, from being "a persecutor, and blasphemer, and injurious," was numbered with the apostles; and who was made so efficiently to serve the Gospel of the grace of God. There was "Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God;" who was led not by a mighty effort to rush into the kingdom of God, but whose heart was opened by a gentle process, to attend to the things which were spoken by Paul; who was baptized, with her household, and constrained the apostles to abide in her house. There was the Philippian jailor, who, in the anguish of his mind, inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart unto righteousness; and who united himself to the apostles and their followers. But

time would fail to tell of martyrs, confessors, and a multitude which no man can number, who have lived, and laboured, and died for Christ and the church. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." *

This argument, in favour of Christian communion, derives additional weight from *the original and permanent design of the institution*. The church exists for the sake of the world. No Christian man liveth unto himself. While he works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, he will feel a lively interest in the cause of Christ, and a benevolent concern for the souls of men. The religion of Jesus is not a principle of selfishness, but a principle of benevolence. If we are enlightened, we are to arise and shine; if we are converted, we are to strengthen our brethren; if we are comforted, we are to comfort others; and if we have "all things richly to enjoy," we are to "be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." The care of the soul is not to be neglected in the care of the body; and the life that is to come in the care of that which now is. We are to look into our families, neighbourhoods, country, and world, and see who are wandering from

* Hebrews xii. 1.

the fold of Christ ; and then we are to invite them to the house of God, instruct them in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and spare no pains to promote their salvation. Nor are the efforts of the church to be confined to one section, or province, or period of the world, but to comprehend within their mighty range the whole human family, and all the successive generations of men. If, therefore, the church were to become extinct, or to be diminished and brought low, the light of the world would be quenched, and the salt of the earth would lose its savour. But who can point out the nature, or define the extent, or limit the duration of those blessings which would be withheld or withdrawn from the world ? Now the most effectual way to frustrate the mission of the church, and close her doors of labour and usefulness, is to neglect fellowship with her members, and thus diminish her strength, her numbers, and her resources.

But the argument is not yet exhausted. The existence of the church, and its perpetuation to future times, are founded upon the communion of saints ; and the neglect of this duty *involves the dissolution of the church, if not the destruction of Christianity*. The force of the argument lies in this : If one have a right to stand aloof or withdraw from the church, a second and a third and indeed all must have the same right ; the obligation

to membership must be binding upon all or none; and if all were to stand aloof, or withdraw from the church, there would be no church; and if no church, no ministry; and if no ministry, no ordinances; and if no ordinances, perhaps no salvation. The principle wages war against heaven and earth; and what would be the issue, if it were universally adopted, it is as easy to foresee, as it is painful to contemplate. The paths of life and death would no more be set before us; no preacher of righteousness would unfold his message, and point out the way of salvation; no Sabbath would again shine upon us; no sacrament would again be administered to us; no voice would again be heard, saying, "Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord." The light would be extinguished; the altar would be overturned; the golden candlestick would be displaced; and the sacred incense, which sent rolling up in clouds its rich perfumes to heaven, would be exchanged for a poisonous vapour. "There is no salvation out of the church," not in a Romish, but in a Christian sense; and if the church, therefore, were to cease, salvation would be extremely problematical, though not altogether impossible. And what, if we may indulge the thought, would be the funeral obsequies of an extinct church and ruined world? What tears ought to be wept at such a sight? What sorrow, lamentation, and woe should be excited by such a spectacle?

Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light, and the moon her brightness ; to cover the ocean with mourning, and the heavens with sackcloth? or were the whole fabric of the material universe to become animated and vocal, could she utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe? ¹

If these facts are so, if these principles are true, it follows, that we ought, as believing or repentant sinners, to connect ourselves with the church of God. This is a duty which is imperative in its nature, and indispensable in its obligation. If we are members of the body of Christ, we must be "living epistles, known and read of all men ;" we must be "the lights of the world," and "the salt of the earth ;" and we ought to make an open avowal and public profession of our faith. "Whosoever shall confess me before men," of which confession fellowship with the church is an essential part, "him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." *

But here the question may be asked, "Are there no secret Christians? Are there none who make religion an affair between God and their own soul? Are there none who have the nature without the name, the substance without the shadow, the power

¹ See Robert Hall on the Loss of the Soul. * Matthew x. 32, 33.

without the form of godliness?" While we readily admit that we are inadequate judges of the state of man, in relation to God and eternity, and that many will be found on the right hand at the last day whom we expected to see on the left, yet we hold, as a general rule, that the tree must be known by its fruit, that religion must be avowed and professed, and that, if there be secret Christians, we have never seen them, either because they are secret, or because they are not to be found. If, however, secret communion or invisible membership with the church be admitted in special cases and under special circumstances; if there should be secret Christians, or invisible members of the church, in the sense of isolation from the church, we are quite sure that they should be secret no more, invisible no longer, but confess Christ before men, let their light shine, and suffer with Christ, that they may be glorified with him. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," is a standing maxim, through all generations; and that we cannot be trimmers between the church and the world is a point which is equally attested by Scripture and reason.

Without, however, disregarding or depreciating the claims of the church upon our fellowship and services, we maintain that "Christ is all and in all." *The Church is not Christ; and Churchism is not Christianity.* A man may be a member of the

church and not a member of Christ; and a man may have the form without the power of godliness. The institution may be substituted for the founder; the means may be used without the grace; and mere externalism may be taken for inward religion. But this is the perversion of sacred things. Church polity, religious ordinances, and Christian communion are nothing apart from Christ; and he is to be considered as the centre and source of all good,—the giver of grace, the bond of union, the spring of action, and the fountain of joy. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."* But nevertheless the claims of the church, and the obligations of membership, rest upon the surest foundation.

READER: THERE IS A VISIBLE CHURCH IN THE WORLD; AND THERE ARE NO INVISIBLE MEMBERS OF THAT CHURCH.

* Romans ii. 28, 29.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAITHFUL IS FRAUGHT WITH GREAT AND MANIFOLD ADVANTAGES.

“BUT are there any *ordinances* now, since life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel? Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any *means ordained* of God *as the usual channels of his grace*? This question could never have been proposed in the apostolical church, unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a Heathen; the whole body of Christians being agreed that Christ had ordained certain outward means *for conveying his grace into the souls of men*. Their constant practice set this beyond all dispute; for so long as ‘all that believed were together, and had all things common,’ (Acts ii. 44,) ‘they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.’ (Verse 42.)”—WESLEY.

SELF-LOVE is one of the strongest and most powerful principles of action implanted in the human bosom. It is this which forms the basis of our character, and directs and animates us in all the objects of our pursuit. See the hero, the statesman, the philosopher, the man of science, and the man of business, for the sake of honour, power, knowledge, wealth, and pleasure, rising early and sitting up late; enduring anxious days, and sleepless nights; sacrificing ease, health, friends, and safety; and meeting

death under every form. Selfishness, which is a perversion of self-love, is indeed the degradation and misery of our nature; but self-love is incorporated with the very essence of our being; and, when restrained within proper limits, and animated by right motives, it is glorifying to God and serviceable to man. Now to this natural instinct the economy of our salvation appeals, teaching us that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

It must be acknowledged that all the truths of the Gospel are all-important and spirit-stirring. But their being known does not include their being felt; and the clearness of knowledge is but too often the frost of feeling. As man is not all pure intellect, something must be presented to the sensitive part of his nature, to rouse him to "seek those things which are above;" and while religion addresses the reason, the prudence, and the foresight of men, it also addresses their hopes and fears, and especially their regard for their own interests and happiness. While self-dedication is a "reasonable service," "godliness is great gain."

The grand consideration by which we ought to be impelled first to give ourselves to the Lord, and then to his church, is that we are placed under universal and imperative obligation to do so. This is a duty which is founded, as we have seen, upon the Word


of God, the example of holy men of old, the relations of the church to the world, and the perpetuation of religion to future ages and generations. This is a duty which is binding upon every pardoned and redeemed sinner, and every sincere and earnest seeker of salvation.

But beside the fact of duty which should silence every objection, and overcome all supineness, there are other considerations which are adapted to act powerfully on the mind. Weigh them as we proceed; consider the influence they ought to exert; and surely they will impel some to unite themselves to the church of God. If it can be shown that the church, including the teaching, the institutions, and the fellowship of the church, has a manifest relation to our most important interests; that it involves our defence and safety; that it forms the pillar of our support; that it supplies the shield of the soul, the only hope of the guilty, the only comfort of the dying, the only prospect of eternal happiness; and that it is adapted to the physical, social, intellectual, moral, spiritual, and immortal nature of man, it must be admitted that communion with the church is not only a duty which ought to be performed, but a privilege which ought to be eagerly sought.

Before we proceed, it will be necessary to anticipate an objection which will be started. It will be asked with an air of seeming triumph: "May not

all the advantages particularized be possessed and enjoyed by the hearers of the Word, as well as the members of the church? May not the pleasures of contemplation, the pleasures of sympathy and benevolence, and the pleasures of hope, be insured without a nearer approach to the church? May not a man be as safe, wise, holy, happy, and useful out of a church as in one?" These questions must be answered negatively. It will be admitted that intellectual enjoyment, and the felicity of doing good to the bodies of men, may be partially possessed by the mere hearers of the Gospel and outer-court worshippers; but even these pleasures are really best enjoyed,—enjoyed with the truest relish, and so as to extract from them the largest amount of genuine satisfaction, by the man who has entered the inner court; while all the other advantages enumerated are only to be obtained within the sacred precincts of the church.

The advantages of Christian communion must now be particularized and enumerated; and the conclusion established, that interest, as well as duty, urges us to connect ourselves with the church of Christ. What, then, has church fellowship to offer? The answer is, that while it saves us from numberless evils, it puts us in possession of innumerable blessings. "More precious than rubies," and more to be desired than riches, are the advantages which it insures in both worlds.



It involves security. The temptations to which we are exposed arise from the world, as well as "the flesh and the devil." The men of the world, the example of the world, the maxims of the world, the spirit of the world, the business of the world, and the pleasures of the world, will follow, find, and assail the Christian wherever he may be found, and in whatever station he may be placed. The danger arising from intercourse with an ungodly world exceeds all the alarm which can be given. "We are all," says Locke, "a kind of chameleons that take a tincture from the objects that surround us." The wise man has also said, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." * "The contagious disease which extends its ravages for a thousand miles around us excites in our minds terror and alarm. We use the greatest precaution against the danger. But the contagion of bad company gives not the smallest alarm. We breathe without fear an air the most infected and fatal to the soul. We form connexions, enter into engagements, and contract marriages with profane, sceptical, and worldly people; and regard all those as declaimers and enthusiasts, who declare that 'evil communications corrupt good manners.'" But what words will suffice adequately to express the danger of bad company? Nothing is more contagious than evil

example. The sight, the presence, the voice, the breath, the touch of the wicked are infected, and fatal to the soul. But, by separation from the world and connexion with the church, we escape these innumerable and powerful temptations. The business and transactions of the world require, indeed, that we should mingle with ungodly men; but still, if we are required to go on the Enchanted Ground, we should not make a long stay there;—we should not walk in the “counsel of the ungodly,” nor stand “in the way of sinners,” nor “sit in the seat of the scornful.”

The world opposes the Christian not only by its maxims, fashions, and examples; by its attractions and society; but by its sneers, reproaches, and terrors. Persecution in word, if not in deed, cannot fail; it is the very badge of discipleship; it is one of the seals of the Christian calling; and it is the sure portion of all “that will live godly in Christ Jesus.” The world will speak of their faith as folly; their hope as presumption; their meekness and forgiveness of injuries as meanness and cowardice; their sanctity as singularity; and the whole of their religion as the garb of hypocrisy and the cloak of wickedness. But this persecution of the tongue is light, when it falls upon the community, rather than upon the individual. The union of Christian believers among themselves thus lessens their burdens, and allevi-

ates their sufferings, as well as multiplies their pleasures.

It inspires vigilance. The recollection that the eyes of the world and the church are upon us, will be a check to evil and a motive to good. There is such a feeling as respect for public opinion; and there are few, if any, who like to come under the condemnation of their fellow-men. But a sentiment much stronger is a regard for consistency as members of the church of God; and while the scrutiny of Omniscience cannot fail to influence our conduct, the surveillance of our fellow-Christians, and the fear of bringing scandal upon the church, may lead us to "walk circumspectly." The consciousness that the all-seeing eye of God is never closed, but penetrates our inmost thoughts, and knows our most covert designs, will prompt us to abstain from sin in thought, as well as in word and deed, and to "serve him in sincerity and in truth." The consciousness, also, "that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses" among men, will impel us to "give diligence;" to "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation;" to resist the first advances of carnal security; to exercise a sleepless care over all our tendencies, emotions, and habits; and to cultivate with the most intense devotion whatever may assist our Christian improvement, and augment our Christian strength.

Without, then, disregarding the higher motives to watchfulness derived from the temptations by which we are assailed, and the dangers to which we are exposed, the coming of our Lord, and the uncertainty of the time of his coming, we cannot but think that our connexion with the church of Christ will be a powerful motive to Christian vigilance.

It guides and regulates our social instincts. Man is a social being. He was made not for solitude, but for society. Hence, when the earth had been fashioned, and the ocean poured into its bed; when the heavens had been stretched out, and suns lighted up; when the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and the beast of the field had been created, and man made, as the head and chief of the system which he inhabits, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."* When mankind had multiplied and replenished the earth, they were distributed into families, and settled in tribes or nations. After the confusion of tongues and the dispersion of men, the social principle was developed; and families, communities, and nations entire soon sprang up in various parts of the world. But man naturally seeks for a closer union, another self, a kindred spirit, with whom he may lessen his cares by sympathy, and multiply his pleasures by participation; and this has

* Genesis ii. 18.

given rise to the cultivation of friendship, which, apart from piety, is one of the fairest productions of the human soil, and the dispenser of innumerable blessings. Search as we may, we shall find no principle more deeply laid in nature than the social element, or more comprehensive and important in its bearings.

This principle the church recognises: it gathers congregations, forms societies, and holds communion: and it imparts a principle of equity, a character of mildness, and the principle of sympathy and benevolence, to all the intercourse of social life. It imparts a principle of equity to all the arrangements of commerce and the transactions of trade. "To do justly," as well as "love mercy and walk humbly with God," is a maxim by which its members are to be guided in all things. It tames the ferocity of the disposition, calms the turbulence of the passions, and produces the meekness and gentleness of Christ, by the teaching of its Founder and the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is also such a sentiment as sympathy with others, rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and weeping with them that weep; and this is experienced nowhere with such intensity as in the "household of faith." It not only imparts the principle of benevolence, but guides its exercise, marks out its path, selects its objects, and secures its reward. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the

Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." * "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" † The church is a family, a community, a public body; and all systems which ignore this principle are essentially systems of enervation, turpitude, and vice. Monasteries and convents are nurseries of vice; and monks and nuns are a scandal to moral virtue, and a satire on human nature. Now whatever tends to guide and regulate the social principle essentially contributes to the well-being and happiness of mankind; and this the communion of the church effectually does, restraining its abuses, presenting a sphere for its development, placing it under the control of right principles, and directing it to proper objects.

It opens to us numerous avenues of intellectual enjoyment. Man is an intelligent creature; a creature capable of knowledge. The powers of man are partly intellectual. The intellectual powers of man include understanding, judgment, memory, imagination, and reason; and much is placed within the range of these faculties. The understanding of man enables him to tread the flowery walks of literature, and explore the mighty range of science. The

* James i. 27.

† 1 John iii. 17.

judgment of man enables him to compare things which differ, and ascertain the relative importance of things. The memory of man enables him to retain the truths which are apprehended by the understanding and approved by the judgment, until he is enriched with all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The imagination of man enables him to present the facts of science and the truths of religion in the gayest and most beautiful forms, and to paint with "colours dipped in heaven" things human and divine. The reason of man enables him to argue a point rationally; to debate a matter; and to deduce consequences justly from preceding premises.

A fine field for the use of these noble faculties is opened in the walks of science. I am not disposed to limit the field of human knowledge. For, though, amidst abundant disclosures, the Divine Being maintains, on many points, a dignified reserve, yet matter and mind, the heavens and the earth, things seen and things unseen, come under our view. There is the knowledge of philosophy, which subjects nature to its scrutiny, analyses its parts, ascertains its laws, and traces effects to the causes by which they are produced. There is the knowledge of astronomy, which tells the number of the stars, explains the laws of the planetary worlds, and calculates with an amazing exactness the periods of their varied revolutions. There is the knowledge of anatomy, which names the

parts, explains the economy, and points out the uses of the animal frame, which is "fearfully and wonderfully made." There is the knowledge of chemistry, which unfolds the nature of all material bodies, determines the number of their component parts, teaches us how those parts are united, and by what means they may be separated and re-combined. There is the knowledge of metaphysics or mental philosophy, which relates to mind; there is the knowledge of poetry, history, and polite literature; and there is the knowledge of mechanics, mathematics, and law. Human knowledge is almost unlimited as to the range of its subjects; and, while it furnishes ample scope for the exercise of our mental faculties, it cannot fail to minister to our pleasure.

The works and ways of God afford still ampler scope for the development of our most capacious powers, and yield a richer enjoyment. The universe presents a most astonishing scene to a mind of a contemplative turn. Whether we consider the heavens above, the sun shining in his strength, the moon walking in her brightness, and the stars fulfilling their courses; or the earth beneath, the smiling field, the beautiful landscape, and the cloud-capped mountain, we are filled with wonder and astonishment. Whether we consider the conduct of God in relation to nations or individuals, our hearts swell with admiration and delight. The works of the Lord,

however, are not only wonderful in themselves, but they exhibit, in characters the most legible and impressive, the glorious perfections of Deity, declaring "his eternal power and Godhead." "The invisible things of God are made known" by the things "that appear," symbolizing and demonstrating as these do the concealed existence and attributes of God:—

"These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair: Thyself how wondrous then!"

The ways of heaven also are placed before us not for our animadversion, but for our admiration. Here, then, is a sphere for the highest efforts of the human mind, and a source of the richest gratification to the human heart.

But the church opens a wider field for the human intellect, presents more ennobling subjects of contemplation, applies more powerful stimulants, and affords a richer repast. The church has a history which reaches back to "the beginning," and which will be continued to the millennial condition of our race, and even to the final consummation of all things. The church has a literature, embracing poetry, philosophy, jurisprudence, antiquities, geography, and chronology, which should command the attention and respect of the whole human race. The church has a theology, to which nothing can be added without debasing its spirit, and from which nothing can be taken away

without impairing its proportions. What an order of sublime and glorious truths does the Gospel infuse into the simplest minds! First of all, that there is a God; that he made all things out of nothing; that all in nature is but the shadow of himself; that he has given to man a law which is a copy of his eternal mind; that we have broken that law, and incurred its dreadful penalty; that God is just, and therefore cannot overlook the breach of his law; compassionate, and therefore wills the salvation of mankind; and that, in order to harmonize these conflicting attributes, he has given his only-begotten Son as the Surety and Representative of the sinning race; that, through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, pardon, holiness, and heaven, are purchased for us; that all the fitness required on our part is repentance and faith; that the Holy Spirit is employed in enlightening, regenerating, and sanctifying our corrupt hearts; that there will be a resurrection of the just and unjust, a judgment to come, and an unalterable condition of happiness and misery in a future state. Now add to these sublime truths all the sublime promises of the Gospel, and you have such a class of noble principles as cannot be found within the whole compass of human learning. Here, then, the understanding, the judgment, the memory, the imagination, and the reason of man will find a wider scope, an ampler range, and a more powerful impetus, than in all the

walks of knowledge, and the works of nature and providence; the understanding in apprehending, the judgment in comparing, the memory in holding fast, the imagination in combining, and the reason in arguing "the deep things of God." "There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." * This action and discipline of the mental faculties will open also a pleasure as copious as it is rich; a felicity to which the pleasures of sense, and even the joys of science, cannot be compared; a happiness which resembles the felicities of angels and the blessedness of God.

It affords scope for the exercise of moral discipline. Man is a moral agent; a creature capable of action, and accountable for conduct. The powers of man are partly moral. The moral powers of man include will, conscience, passions, and affections; and much is placed within the range of these capacities. The will of man enables him to choose virtue or vice, happiness or misery, heaven or hell. The conscience of man enables him to discern the difference between good and evil; the beauty of moral excellence, and the deformity of moral turpitude; the advantages resulting from the practice of the one, and the disadvantages resulting from the practice of the other; and to connect with right views right con-

* Job xxxii. 8.

duct, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. The passions and affections of man enable him to cherish love to God, and hatred to sin; "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and "sorrow after a godly sort;" hope as it regards a future life, and fear as it regards the fatal consequences of sin in a future state. Now while the mental faculties are to be exercised and stimulated, the moral powers are to be trained and disciplined; the will to submit and choose aright, the conscience to approve the right and pursue the things that are more excellent, and the passions and affections to love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, according to the object towards which these passions may be directed. This discipline is not to be obtained in the schools of philosophy or the seats of learning; but in the bosom of the church.

The communion of the church is a moral discipline; and the church has a code of laws which is admirably adapted to exercise the moral faculties and form the moral character. God has an unquestionable right to place the rational, accountable, and immortal creatures which he has made under such laws as his infinite wisdom sees fit. In pursuance of this right, all moral agents are placed under a law which determines the moral quality of their actions, and subjects them to rewards and punishments. Natural conscience, when supernaturally enlightened

by the grace and Spirit of God, is a true and proper touchstone of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our actions, "bearing witness, and accusing or else excusing." But God has plainly and directly revealed his law to his church, as well as written it on the hearts of all men. It was originally engraven on two tables of stone by the finger of God, called the ten words or commandments. It is emphatically designated the moral law, to distinguish it from the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law was partial in its obligation, only binding upon the Jews; and transient in its duration, only in force during that obscure and shadowy dispensation. But the moral law is universal and unchangeable. Every part of it must remain in full force upon all mankind, and in every age of the world, as not depending upon time, or place, or any other circumstances liable to change; but upon the nature of God, and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relations to each other. The details of this law are full and particular, referring to God, ourselves, and others. There are duties enjoined, with respect to God, including love, purity, and obedience; with respect to ourselves, including temperance and chastity; and with respect to others, including equity, meekness, and benevolence. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two

commandments hang all the law and the prophets." * "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." † Nowhere else have we a perfect system of morals; and the deficiencies of pagan morality only exalt the purity, the comprehensiveness, and the sublimity of the Christian system. This code of laws, which is peculiar to the Christian church, is sanctioned by an authority which ought to sway the will; enacted by Moses, and explained by Christ with a precision and perspicuity which ought to enlighten and guide the conscience; and enforced by a recompense of good and evil which ought to govern the heart and life. The church is thus a school of discipline, as well as instruction; and while it teaches, it "trains in the way in which we should go." Whether within or without the church, we are under the law; but while, within the church, law is enforced and observed, without the church it is a dead letter. The church has also prudential arrangements, and an ecclesiastical *régime*, which contribute to the discipline of our moral character and habits.

It supplies us with the means of spiritual improvement. It is a law, which is developed both in the natural and moral world, that things and even men do not reach maturity at once, but by slow degrees.

* Matthew xxii. 37, 40.

+ Matthew vii. 12.

We mark, with pleasing wonder, the process of vegetation;—the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear; the first green of spring, and then the golden fruitage of autumn. We behold the childhood, the youth, and the manhood of our nature; the force of habit, for good or evil, acquiring additional strength from day to day, at all ages, and in all conditions; the first sparklings of mind and sportings of genius, and then not only the capacious, but the well-furnished, the well-arranged, and the well-balanced intellect. As it is in nature, so it is in grace. We see the Christian “changed from glory into glory;” rising to higher attainments in the divine life, and brighter displays of the glory of God, until he is sublimated, if we may use the expression, into a spiritual, glorified, and eternal state. Our Lord speaks of “the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear;” and St. John speaks of “babes, young men, and fathers.” “Forgetting those things which are behind,” says St. Paul, “and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* “And beside this,” says St. Peter, “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness

* Philippians iii. 13, 14.

brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."*

The means of advancement are found in the ordinances of the church. There are means of grace which are the common privilege of all, such as an open Bible, a holy Sabbath, a faithful ministry, and a convincing Spirit; and these ought to be duly estimated and faithfully improved. But there are ordinances of religion, which are almost the exclusive privilege of the people of God, such as social prayer, the holy communion, and Christian fellowship; and these cannot fail to minister to our edification and comfort. The sacred intercourse of the pious spirit with God, at the solemn hour and frequented place of prayer, is fraught with the richest grace and consolation to the spiritual worshipper. The communion of the body and blood of Christ can hardly fail to strengthen our faith, quicken our hope, and increase our love. Fellowship, one with another, reveals the inward workings of the human heart; teaches us that our trials are not peculiar; supplies the means of discerning and correcting our errors; ministers instruction, admonition, and encouragement; and affords seasonable help in the resistance of temptation, and the performance of duty. As "iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."† "Even the youths

* 2 Peter i. 5, 7.

† Proverbs xxvii. 17.

shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall : but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*

Means and advantages, however, will be of no avail without diligence. There is scarcely anything in the world of intrinsic value and sterling worth, the attainment of which does not require much labour and attention. If we wish to have our minds well stored with a fund of useful knowledge, that knowledge is only to be obtained by the closest study, and the most intense application. If we wish to become well acquainted with any branch of trade or science, it is necessary for us to serve a tedious apprenticeship, in order to a thorough knowledge of its principles, and in order to its becoming an easy as well as an every-day concern. Now if the mastering of worldly professions and earthly attainments requires so much labour and attention, is it to be expected that religion shall cost us nothing at all ? It is true, indeed, speaking in reference to merit, that all the glory of our salvation must be given to God alone, as the result of the freeness and riches of his grace. “For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God : not of works, lest any man should boast.”† But then,

* Isaiah xl. 30, 31.

† Ephesians ii. 8, 9.

notwithstanding this most encouraging fact, a diligent and persevering use of the appointed means is strictly enjoined and uniformly required in the Word of God. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."* "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."† "The hand of the diligent maketh rich ;" and just in proportion to our diligence will be our possession of the riches of grace, and our preparedness for the riches of glory.

It furnishes us with broad and open opportunities of doing good. Efforts to do good to the bodies of men are often made without the pale of the church. A man may supply the wants and alleviate the sufferings of his fellow-men, without the grace of God in his heart. A man may "devise liberal things," without the principle of charity. A man may be scaffolding in the erection of the building, without being "a living stone." But efforts to do good to the bodies and souls of men are chiefly made within the borders of the church. The duty of doing good is here based upon a right principle, and enforced by an adequate motive. The principle is love to God and man ; and the motive is the glory of God and the good of mankind.

The church opens spheres of activity and useful-

* Luke xiii. 24.

† Philippians ii. 12, 13

ness so numerous and widely extended, that all hearts may be engaged, and all hands enlisted. The Bible Society, which has been formed for the diffusion of the Word of God through all classes of men and all nations of the earth ; the Missionary Institution, which has been established for the propagation of the Gospel through the world ; and Sunday Schools, which have for their object the illumination of the understanding, the formation of the moral and religious character, and the salvation of the souls of the rising generation, are the institutions of the church. Hospitals for the diseases of the body ; asylums for the maladies of the mind ; dispensaries for the sick poor ; penitentiaries for the returning profligate ; schools of industry for the blind, the deaf, and the dumb ; and refuges for the aged and the helpless, are either directly or indirectly its own creations ; and they abound most where its influence is most powerful. A thousand doors of usefulness stand open to the people of God, which are shut to men of the world. A member of the church may be a visitor of the sick ; a distributor of tracts ; a leader of prayer ; a preacher of the word ; “ a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes,” and an instrument of the most extensive and lasting good.

Men of the amplest fortunes will find scope for the exercise of a large benevolence. Minds richly

endowed and furnished will find a sphere for the most capacious understanding, the most retentive memory, the most discriminating judgment, the most acute reason, and the most brilliant fancy, in explaining and defending the principles and duties of religion. Personal endowments of form and speech ; and circumstances of birth, fame, and power, may be pressed into the service, and used for the benefit of the church. The man with one talent needs not bury it in the earth, and incur the displeasure of his Lord ; but he may employ it to the greatest advantage in the cause of Christ. There are no gifts and acquirements, however varied and extensive, and there are no talents, however few and small, but may be sanctified on the altar of God.

It insures the success and prosperity of our efforts.
We all naturally desire success in any work in which we are engaged ; and we are to be commended for this desire. The hope of success gives an energy, a steadiness, and a perseverance to our exertions which nothing else can impart. But while success in all earthly pursuits is extremely doubtful, and the best concerted schemes signally fail, success in the work in which the church is engaged is absolutely certain. It will contribute to the glory of God, our own salvation, and the interests and salvation of our fellow-men.

The hope of success rests upon the promise of

God. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." * The hope of success rests also upon the fellowship of the church. It is through the medium of the church that mankind are to be blessed; and when the church is faithful, earnest, and united in heart and effort, what may we not expect? Individual exertions are comparatively weak and fruitless; but concentration of effort is crowned with success. We see this in arts and arms; in the ordinary business and transactions of life; and in the all-important concerns of religion and salvation. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour." †

There is, however, no reason for despair, or even despondency, when our efforts are not crowned with immediate success. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." ‡ How often have we seen this illustrated in the course of our own labours! Under the preaching of the word, a man is impressed with a deep and lasting concern for the salvation of his soul. But the convictions of conscience are repressed; the influences of the Spirit are resisted; and the affairs of eternity are put off to a more convenient season. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, he goes

* Ecclesiastes xi. 6. † Ecclesiastes iv. 9. ‡ Ecclesiastes xi. 1.

on in his career of evil. But the indestructible seed has found a lodgment in his heart; and at length he yields, and is saved by grace. This is not a *fancy picture*; but it is one taken from *real life*. How often has this been illustrated in the conversion of the children of pious parents! Dedicated to God in baptism; taught the word of God and the way to the kingdom; prayed for, and yearned over, without ceasing, they outrage all pains and care until, it may be, their parents are gone into the world of spirits. But the seed is found after many days. Early dedication to God, religious instruction, and prayerful solicitude, have not been in vain in the Lord. Conversion, though long sought and long delayed, is at last the happy result. The history of Christian Missions furnishes us with some of the most impressive illustrations of this truth. One sows and another reaps. Brainerd laboured among Indian savages, Schwartz in Hindoostan, Coke in the West Indies and America, and Morrison in China; but others have entered into their labours. Future times will reap the fruit of present toil. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

It issues in a rich and glorious reward. The church upon earth, and the church in heaven, are one; and all who are vitally united to Christ here,

* Galatians vi. 9.

will assuredly be with him hereafter; all who are partakers of his sufferings will be sharers of his glory. As he was the representative of his followers, what was accomplished in him, will be accomplished in them; the victory which he gained, he will impart to them; and the glory into which he has entered, he has prepared for them. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* In nothing that our Saviour suffered or obtained, is he to be regarded as a private character. Nothing was suffered on his own account, and nothing was obtained merely for his own benefit. As "he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities;" as he was made a sin-offering "for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" as he "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" so the reward which he merited is not confined to his own person, but accrues to all the members of his mystical body. But then, to be members of the body of Christ, we have seen, is to be members of his church. The communion of

* John xiv. 1-8.

the church is thus introductory to our fellowship with Christ, when "we shall see him as he is," without a darkening and obscuring medium; and with his followers, when "we shall see eye to eye," without the peculiarities of creed, and without the prejudices and predilections of party.

But what heart can conceive, or what tongue can declare, the beauty of the church on her bridal day, and in her glorified state? Reader, I would describe it in lively colours if I could; but there is a mystery about it which no human mind can penetrate. I have seen the sun, the bright orb of day, filling the heavens with his splendours and the earth with his influences. It is but an emblem of that lustre in which the church shall hereafter shine. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."* I have beheld the heavens by night, rendered brilliant by the resplendent lustre of a multitude of shining orbs, differing from each other in magnitude and splendour. They are but emblems of the degrees of glory, and probably the orders, rank rising above rank, which obtain in the heavenly hierarchy. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."† I have seen the most magnificent structures of ancient and modern times, at home and

* Matthew xiii. 43.

† Daniel xii. 3.

abroad; presenting the noblest and most stupendous monuments of human taste, and skill, and grandeur. They are but emblems of the house with many mansions. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* I have beheld crowns of gold, enriched with costly gems and sparkling diamonds. They are but emblems of the church crowned with glory, and enthroned with Christ. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."† I have walked the crowded city, surveying its gates, its walls, its bulwarks, its temples, and its glory. They are but emblems of a city whose gates are pearls; whose walls are precious stones; whose guards are angels; and whose light, and temple, and glory are the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."‡ I have thought of the Sabbath, as a day of divine sanction, a day of holy duties, and a day of Christian gladness and anticipation. It is but an emblem of the final, the perfect, the eternal Sabbath. "There remaineth therefore, σαββατισμός, a sabbath to the people of God."§ But the sublimity, the overflowing ful-

* 2 Corinthians v. 1.

† Revelation ii. 10.

‡ Revelation xxi. 2.

§ Hebrews iv. 9.

ness of the bliss, and the perpetuity of that life to which the fellowship of the faithful conducts, defy the possibility of description, and exceed the utmost limits of human comprehension. "Eye hath not seen,"¹—and yet the eye has beheld the most beautiful scenes, "nor ear heard,"—and yet the ear has listened to the most harmonious sounds, "neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,"—and yet the heart has imagined the noblest scenes, peopled them with the gayest forms, adorned them with the fairest objects, tinged them with the brightest colours, and placed them in the strongest light. All these images convey but a faint and imperfect idea of the church glorified. Beyond the highest glory, there is yet an unpierced and unapproached light;—a range of knowledge, a perfection of holiness, sources of enjoyment, and a perpetuity of bliss open before us, which surpass thought, which escape the combining power of the imagination itself, and which the light of eternity can alone disclose to our view.

¹ Though this passage primarily refers to the glories of the Christian dispensation, yet it may be secondarily applied to the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST IS THE DIVINELY APPOINTED SYMBOL OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CHURCH, BUT NOT SUBVERSIVE OF OTHER TESTS:—SUCH AS A “FORM OF SOUND WORDS,” THE CHURCH MEETING, AND THE CLASS MEETING.

“OUR Lord Jesus Christ hath subjected us to his gentle yoke, and light burden; whence with Sacraments most few in number, most easy for observance, most excellent in signification, he *bound together the society of new people*.”—ST. AUSTIN.

“By this Sacrament is signified and sealed that union, which is among our Saviour’s true disciples communicating therein: their being together united in consent of mind, and unity of faith: in mutual good will and affection, in hope and tendency to the same blessed end, in spiritual brotherhood and society; especially upon account of their communion with Christ, which most closely ties them one to another; they partaking of this one individual food become translated, as it were, into one body and substance.”—DR. BARROW.

“They have a holy table among them, the symbol of their communion with one another in the Lord.”—HOWE.

BAPTISM is the initiatory ordinance of the Christian religion. It should be administered once, and never again be repeated. But the Eucharist is the perpetual sign and seal of the covenant of grace. It should be constantly administered and “continued steadfastly in” to the end of our life. All who have been baptized are members of the visible church of God,

and entitled to the external privileges and immunities of the church ; and all who communicate at the table of the Lord, should either be members of the mystical body of Christ and fruit-bearing branches of the true vine, or earnest seekers of salvation. There are other symbols of church communion, but they are merely institutions of human device, while this is an ordinance of divine appointment.

The institution of the Lord's Supper is thus narrated by the sacred historian. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* The points which here claim especial notice are the consecration of bread and wine to this sacred use by prayer and thanksgiving ; the distribution of the elements among the disciples ; the representation of these as signs and seals of the covenant of grace ; and the actual participation in this service, by all present, by eating the bread and drinking the wine. The institution of the Lord's Supper is thus referred

* Matthew xxvi. 26-29.

to by an inspired apostle. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread : and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."* This account the apostle had received not by tradition, but by revelation, —not from the apostles, but from the Lord himself.

This solemn ordinance should be administered continually ; and constant communion is the duty of all Christians. It is not sufficient that we approach the table of the Lord once or twice during the year, but as often as we have opportunity. The holy communion, with the early Christians, was a constant part of the Lord's-day service ; and those who joined in public worship never failed to partake of this blessed Sacrament. It was not confined to the Sabbath day ; but, for centuries, it was received almost every day during the week. "If any believer join in the prayers of the faithful," was an ancient canon, "and go away without receiving the Lord's Supper, let him

* 1 Corinthians xi. 23-26.

be excommunicated, as bringing confusion into the church of God." Whether we consider this Sacrament as a command of God, or as a privilege to man, we must be convinced that we ought to obey the command, and improve the privilege.

The dispositions of mind, with which we should come to the table of the Lord, are too important to be overlooked. There should be strict scrutiny and self-examination. Without humility this service cannot be rendered; but with humility it will never be rejected. "God resisteth the proud; but he giveth grace to the humble." There must be the pouring forth the heart in devotion and praise. Without reverential and exalted thoughts of God, and lively apprehensions of his majesty and mercy, we cannot render an acceptable service. There must, in this nearest of all our approaches to God, be faith in the Word, the promise, and the Son of God. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* Without charity our sacrifice will not be accepted, and we must, therefore, lay aside all envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness. There must be a settled resolve to forsake all sin, to practise all holiness, and to yield obedience to all the commandments of God.

* Hebrews xi. 6.

This duty when performed aright is connected with a participation of the body and blood of Christ. "The grace which we have by the holy Eucharist," says Hooker, "doth not begin, but continue life. That which groweth must of necessity first live. If our bodies did not daily waste, food to restore them were a thing superfluous. In that life, therefore, where neither body nor soul can decay, our souls shall as little require this sacrament, as our bodies corporal nourishment. But as long as the days of our warfare last, during the time that we are both subject to diminution and capable of any augmentation in grace, the words of our Lord and Saviour Christ will remain forcible, 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.'*" Such as will live the life of God, must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man; because this is a part of that diet, which if we want we cannot live. In the Eucharist we so receive the gift of God, that we know by grace what the grace is which God giveth us; the degrees of our own increase in holiness and virtue we see, and can judge of them; we understand that the strength of our life begun in Christ, is Christ; that his flesh is meat, and his blood drink, not by surmised imagination, but truly, even so truly, that through faith we perceive in the body and

* "John vi. 53."

blood, sacramentally presented, the very taste of eternal life; the grace of the Sacrament is here as the food which we eat and drink. The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the Sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the Sacrament."

"The benefits consequent upon our Saviour's passion," Dr. Barrow remarks, "rightly apprehended, heartily believed, seriously considered by us, are hereby lively represented, and effectually conveyed; to the sustenance and nourishment of our spiritual life, to the refreshment and comfort of our souls. It is a holy feast, a spiritual repast, a divine entertainment, to which God in kindness invites us, to which, if we come with well-disposed minds, he there feeds us with most holy and delicious viands, with heavenly manna, with most reviving and cherishing liquor. Bread is the staff of life, the most common, most necessary, and most wholesome, and most savoury meat; wine is the most pleasant and wholesome drink; by them therefore our Lord chose to represent that body and blood, by the oblation of which a capacity of life and health was procured to mankind; the taking in which by right apprehension, tasting it by hearty faith, digesting it by careful attention and meditation, converting it into our substance by devout, grateful, and holy affections, joined with serious and steady resolutions of living

answerable thereto, will certainly support and maintain our spiritual life in a vigorous health and happy growth of grace ; refreshing our hearts with comfort and satisfaction unspeakable. *He that doeth thus, eats our Saviour's flesh, and drinks his blood,* (that is, who, as our Saviour interpreteth it, doth believe in him, that belief importing all other acts of mind and will, connected with right persuasions concerning him,) *hath eternal life, and shall live for ever,* as himself declares and promises : which benefits therefore, in the due performance of this holy duty, are conveyed unto us."

"As he gave himself in his Son," Charnock observes, "so he gives his Son in the Sacrament; he doth not only give him as a Sacrifice upon the cross for the expiation of our crimes, but as a feast upon the table for the nourishment of our souls: in the one he was given to be offered; in this he gives him to be partaken of, with all the fruits of his death: under the image of the sacramental signs, every believer doth eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the great Mediator of the Covenant. The words of Christ, *This is my body and this is my blood,* are true to the end of the world. This is the most delicious viand of heaven, the most exquisite dainty food, God can feed us with; the delight of the Deity, the admiration of angels: a feast with God is great, but a feast on God is greater. Under those signs

that body is presented ; that which was conceived by the Spirit, inhabited by the Godhead, bruised by the Father to be our food, as well as our propitiation, is presented to us on the table : that blood which satisfied justice, washed away our guilt on the cross, and pleads for our persons at the throne of grace ; that blood which silenced the curse, pacified heaven, and purged earth, is given to us for our refreshment."

Such are the views of Episcopalian and Nonconformist divines. Repudiating the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the transmutation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, held by Papists, and the doctrine of consubstantiation, or the presence of Christ in or with the bread and wine, held by Luther, they maintain that Christ is in the believing communicant, by the presence and indwelling of his Spirit, nourishing the inner life, strengthening and refreshing the soul, and preparing for the various duties and temptations of the world.


Without entering further into the questions of the divine authority and perpetual obligation of this Christian ordinance ; the spirit and manner in which it should be used ; and the results with which it is associated,—questions of the highest interest, but not necessarily connected with our present thesis,—we must now remark that it is the distinguishing badge of our Christian profession. Without this, it is difficult to conceive how any man can regard himself as

even a consistent professor of the Christian faith ; and, with this, a man may have the profession, without the principle, of religion. But, nevertheless, all who approach the table of the Lord do thereby indicate or set forth, either a professional belief of the Gospel, or living faith in Jesus Christ. This blessed sacrament is the authorized and appointed form of communion ; it marks the line of separation between the church and the world ; it declares solemnly and publicly our adherence to the one and our renunciation of the other ; and it is at once the test of membership, and the means of spiritual strength. It is not, however, an infallible criterion of union with Christ, the head of the church. There are many barren professors of religion, and unfruitful servants of Christ ; and there are many admitted to the table of the Lord, who will not be admitted to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. The wheat and the tares grow together ; the church and the world appear in the same assembly, and sit in the same pew ; the righteous and the wicked often eat the same bread, and drink the same wine ; and not until the judgment of the great day will an everlasting distinction " be made between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

This *primary test* of church membership, however, does not supersede *secondary tests* ; and most churches

have their own peculiar means of preserving the purity, and promoting the edification of the church; and also of determining the fitness of candidates, and the consistency and worthiness of members. While all the evangelical churches of Christendom, with but few exceptions, regard the Lord's Supper as THE TEST of connexion with the church of Christ; yet, either theoretically or practically, they make the distinction between primary and secondary tests. The table of the Lord must be fenced, and guarded against the approach of unworthy communicants. While believers and penitents are invited, and welcomed by the Lord himself, unbelieving and impenitent sinners are spurned and rejected. Various checks and guards have, therefore, been introduced by different churches; and while a few of these have increased and aggravated rather than diminished the evil, most have had a salutary effect.

The Church of Rome has her confessional and her penance, as a preparation for high mass; but these, instead of promoting holiness in the world, have been a prolific source of human vice and misery. Whatever imagination can combine in a spectacle of falsehood, perjury, sacrilege, unbridled sensuality, and the "deceivableness of unrighteousness," has been exhibited here in its full dimensions. Individuals, families, communities, and nations have been ruined by this practice. The author could speak as an eye



and ear-witness; he could testify the things which he has seen and heard; but nothing will induce him to pollute his pen and soil his pages by entering into details. Elliott's "Delineation of Roman Catholicism" contains a partial disclosure; but the whole must not be brought to light.

The Church of England has her Catechism, her Creed, and her Confirmation. A knowledge of her Catechism; a belief of her Creed; and the rite of Confirmation, are pre-requisites of the Holy Communion. It was never the intention of this Church, that men should be admitted to the table of the Lord promiscuously, indiscriminately, and at random, without any reference to personal character and meetness; and, if her rubrics were observed and enforced, which require the exclusion of "open and notorious evil livers," and those also "betwixt whom malice and hatred reign," this practice would be discontinued. The formularies of the Church may require that some phrases should be modified which are misleading to the ignorant, and perverted by the crafty; yet we cannot but think that were the pastors of the flock more vigilant and faithful, "the partakers of the Lord's table" would be more consistent, and blameless.

The Congregational Dissenters have their Church-meeting; and, apart from the jurisdiction and surveillance of this meeting, none can be acknowledged

as members, and entitled to the privileges of the church. The admission of members rests with the church-meeting. The candidate is seen by the Minister, the Deacons, or the Elders of the church; a statement of experience is read or given *viva voce*, at the meeting assembled; and the question of reception is affirmed or negated by the suffrages of the members. The exclusion of members rests with the church-meeting. Personal and minor offences are dealt with privately; but when grave offences are committed, a complaint is lodged against the offender; the accuser and the accused are both seen; if the allegation be denied, the case is heard by the church, and, if admitted, the case is reported to the church; and the acquittal or condemnation, the retention or expulsion, of the accused, in all cases hinge upon the vote of the meeting. Church-meetings are not only invested with a judicial character, but they are held for religious purposes. The minister addresses advices and counsels; the members sometimes relate their experience; and minister and members together consider the best means of promoting the peace and prosperity of the church. The highest function of the church meeting is the election of a minister and pastor; and in this election every member has a voice.

The Wesleyan Methodists have their Class-meeting; and, without meeting in Class, few only are

admitted to the Lord's table, and these not without the sanction of the minister. The Class-meeting was never designed to supersede, but encourage our approaches to the altar of God. It is, indeed, at once a passport to and preparation for this higher fellowship. It is a test of membership with the church, but only in connexion with, and subordination to, the primary and more important test of commemorating the dying love of Christ. Every member of the Class is expected and even required to be a communicant at the Lord's table. *

Of the institution of the Class-meeting, our venerable Founder has given us a full and particular account: "In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, viz., on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them, (for their number increased daily,) I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them; and we **always**

concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

"This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than 'a *company of men* having the form, and seeking the power, *of godliness* ; united, in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.'

"That it may the more easily be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every Class ; one of whom is styled *the Leader*. It is his business to see each person in his Class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper ; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require ; to receive what they are willing to give towards the support of the Gospel."

It is an easy matter for ignorant or prejudiced men to misrepresent Class-meetings ; but until they can show us "a more excellent way," it is our wisdom to hold fast that which experience has proved to be good. The Class-meeting, indeed, is not an ordinance of divine appointment, like Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Sabbath, and the Christian Ministry, but is a means of human device ; and it may be

defended on rational and scriptural grounds. It is by this blessed institution, which has special respect to the work of God in the heart, that the blind are led in a right way; the penitent encouraged to the exercise of that faith which brings salvation to the soul; the doubting and perplexed comforted; the cold-hearted and indifferent aroused to a sense of the importance of eternal things; and true believers urged, by the counsels of experience and the prayers of the faithful, to constancy and diligence. Mutual acquaintance with each other is formed; opportunities are afforded of ascertaining the wants of the poor, relieving the destitute, and visiting the sick; and a more endeared affection towards each other is produced. The Class-meeting supplies a medium of intercourse between one Christian and another; it places before us, as in a mirror, the desires and aversions, the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, of God's people; it strengthens and perpetuates our religious convictions, so that impressions, which without it would be evanescent and transitory, often ripen into genuine conversion; it imposes restraints, and exercises a discipline always for good; it is adopted by Christians both within and without the pale of the Establishment; and, more than all, it is the archetype of things so often described in the Word of God,—answering better than any other institution with which we are acquainted, to meetings for religious

conversation and counsel which are spoken of in the Sacred Writings. Class-meetings are not inquisitorial, but their business is confined to statements of religious experience, and the administration of friendly and pious advice. The Wesleyan Methodists are trained to the use of these meetings, which are most enjoyed when the heart glows with love to God, and longs to pour out its joys; and they grow only distasteful when they are most needed to rouse from lethargy, and warn of spiritual declension.

There could be no interchange of thought and feeling, on the things of God, without the use of speech or language. Religious experience is not fiction, but fact. The groaning of godly sorrow is felt; the joy of believing is realized; the pardon of sin is sought and found; adoption into the family of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit are obtained by faith; the renewal of the soul in righteousness and holiness is experienced; and the hope of eternal life is "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." The plague of the heart; the temptations of Satan; and the allurements of the world, give rise to an arduous contention on which our salvation or perdition hangs. The Christian has his days of adversity, as well as his days of prosperity; he has his hours of mental depression, as well as his hours of spiritual elevation; and he has his seasons of sickness, as well as his seasons of health. Sometimes,

under the constraining influence of grateful love, he exclaims, "Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." * But, at other times, in the anguish of his spirit, he inquires, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." † Now the soul is instinctively and irresistibly impelled to pour out its joys and sorrows ; to tell of trials and successes ; and to speak of "fightings without, and fears within." But this can only be done through the medium of conversation ; and the Class-meeting is only religious conversation, rendered more edifying and impressive by the stated hour, hymns of praise, united prayer, kindred spirits, and lessons of wisdom and piety. A Class-meeting is a social party met together to praise, pray, speak to one another, and talk by the way, with an intelligent and experienced Christian to point out the way ; "speak a word in season to him that is weary," a word adapted to time, to occasion, and to circumstance. The objections which are urged against Class-meetings, may be alleged against conversation on religious experience under every form. For time, place, and circumstances are mere accidents, and do not affect the

* Psalm ciii. 1, 2.

† Psalm xlii. 11.

general question. But surely it will not be contended, that it is the wisest and best course for Christian men to impose absolute silence upon themselves with respect to the dealings of God, and the workings of their own hearts.

The Class-meeting *is not a Confessional*. There is no resemblance between the Leader and the Priest. There are no inquiries made by the one, at all like the questions addressed by the other. There is no auricular confession; and there is no priestly absolution. There are no secrets confided, and no penances imposed. The objection is based altogether upon a false and groundless assumption.

But while the institution of the Class-meeting may be defended, it is, like every other good thing, liable to abuse. The Class may be attended with carelessness and irregularity, or the duty of attending may be performed with cold formality and frequent omissions on trivial grounds. Sometimes, a vague and general manner of describing religious experience is adopted; and, at other times, a set of stereotyped phrases is used. The language of voluntary humility may be employed; or a sufficiently low estimate may not be formed of ourselves, and our acquirements in the divine life. The Class-meeting may be substituted for the Lord's Supper, contrary to the design of the institution, and the whole tenor of the Gospel. The Class Leader should

be distinguished by warm and enlightened piety; the possession of a large fund of useful knowledge; a nice discrimination of character; aptness to teach; facility in addressing "a word in season;" fidelity in reproving lukewarmness and sin; and diligence in visiting from house to house;—seeking, in order to save, wanderers from the fold. But should the reverse of all this be the case, and should the Class-meeting be conducted in a cold, lifeless, and spiritless manner, there will be no "fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ;" there will be no sweet interchange between those who are "journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it thee;" and the members will separate as dead, as formal, and as worldly, as when they met together. A late attendance at this, as well as the other means of grace, is a prevailing evil; and it is a sign of a low state of religious experience, if not of an unsanctified heart. Punctuality in religious, as well as in business matters, is the secret of success. Imperfection is stamped upon all ecclesiastical arrangements; and while we cannot point to the Class-meeting as an exception, yet we can show it to be a most useful institution.

Let not then the Evangelical Churchman, or the Protestant Dissenter, blame the Wesleyan Methodist for the use of the Class-meeting, in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, until the one has ignored catechetical instruction, and the other ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

CHAPTER IX.

**THE PALPABLE INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE LIVES
OF NUMEROUS PROFESSORS OF RELIGION AND
THE REAL IMPORT OF THAT PROFESSION, IS THE
CHIEF HINDRANCE TO THE "INCREASE OF THE
BODY."**

"WITH a significant shrug, and the look and tone of sarcastic pleasure, it is said, 'These saints, you see, are no better, after all, than their neighbours. If there is any difference, it is on the wrong side.'"—WARDLAW.

THE Christian religion, as exhibited in the character and teaching of its Founder, cannot fail to command the attention and even admiration of mankind. Humility, remote from meanness; dignity, unstained by pride; holiness, without the least taint of imperfection and sin; patience, under the highest provocations; benevolence, without partiality as to its objects and operations; the forgiveness of injuries, the most unmerited and aggravated that ever were endured; a zeal in doing good, which could not be lessened by the treachery of friends, or the contempt and opposition of enemies; and a greatness of mind, beyond example, in spending his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood, were the most remarkable

features of his character. The benevolent and paternal character of the Divine Being ; the way of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus ; the agency of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration and sanctification of the human heart ; the resurrection and subsequent immortality of the human body ; and the perfect and everlasting felicity of the righteous in heaven, were the truths which he taught on every occasion. Such honey and milk were under his tongue ; so delightful and salutary was his doctrine, that even his enemies were obliged to acknowledge, "Never man spake like this man." While he taught a doctrine, full, pure, and perfect ; he enforced a morality more elevated and comprehensive than is to be found in the pages of Seneca, Epictetus, or any of the heathen philosophers and moralists. Poverty of spirit ; godly sorrow ; "a meek and quiet spirit ;" hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; the merciful temper ; purity of heart ; the peace-making disposition ; and the patient endurance of trial, were duties which he urged by the most powerful motives. Supreme love to God and universal benevolence to man ; a rule of equity, involving an equal consideration of the rights of others with our own ; the forgiveness of enemies ; a purity, extending to the thoughts and intents of the heart ; and the institution of marriage in an indissoluble bond, were maxims which he asserted in opposition to the false

teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. A fairer example, and a more perfect system of doctrine and morals, cannot be conceived; and it is impossible for us to withhold the homage of our understanding and heart.

It was the example and teaching of Christ that extorted from Rousseau an eloquent testimony in favour of Christianity. "I will confess to you farther, that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the Gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers: with all their pomp of diction, how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book at once so sublime and so simple should be the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the air of an enthusiast, or ambitious sectary? What sweetness! What purity of manners! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind! What subtlety! What truth in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where is the philosopher, who could so live and die, without weakness, and without ostentation? Shall we suppose the evangelical history to be a mere

fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction. On the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality, contained in the Gospel; the marks of whose truth are so striking and invincible, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero." This is the constrained acknowledgment of one who will not be accused of partiality towards the Christian religion; and it is all the more valuable on this account.

The life and writings of the apostles exhibit religion under aspects the most captivating and alluring, as well as instructive and edifying. The apostles were the followers and disciples of Christ;—they conformed to his example, and they believed and taught his doctrine. Forsaking all, and following Christ, they were invested with a high and peculiar function. They were the apostles of Christianity. After the day of Pentecost, when they had been endued with power from on high, they were examples of all inward and outward holiness, and "able ministers of the New Testament." Saul of Tarsus was added to their number; and the chief of sinners became the chief of the apostles. Distinguished as he was by the greatness of his learning as a scholar, and the breadth and comprehensiveness of his views

as a writer; possessing a determination of purpose which no difficulties could thwart, and a burning charity which no opposition could quench; manifesting a conscientious and uniform adherence to truth and duty, and unwearied perseverance in any work in which he engaged; and consecrating all his mental and moral qualities to the service of his Lord, he became the most able preacher and the most successful defender of the Christian faith in that, or in any other age of the church of God. Eye and ear-witnesses of the miracles and discourses of the Lord, the apostles testified the things which they had seen, and the things which they had heard;—they recorded the miracles and related the sayings of Christ. The Epistles were a sequel to, and an exposition of, the Gospels; and they place before us the whole plan of religion, give us a full and fair prospect of Christianity, and describe at large and in detail the nature and effects of that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” The Christianity of the apostles, as embodied in action and exhibited in theory, cannot fail to commend itself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

The Christian profession, in every age, involves a conformity of heart and life to the example and teaching of the Son of God. A Christian is one who has the mind of Christ; the same spirit of humility,

holiness, submission, benevolence, and perseverance; and, "if any man have not the spirit of Christ," in all these particulars, "he is none of his." A Christian is one who chooses that good part which Mary chose, who sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his word. Those sublime and affecting discoveries which are made in the Gospel respecting the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost; the fallen state of man, the way of salvation, and a judgment to come; he allows to sink into his heart and govern his life. A Christian is one who sees in himself no ground of hope, no right of access to God, no means of recovery from sin, or of safety from its consequences; and who, in the spirit of entire renunciation of self-confidence and self-righteousness, trusts in Christ alone for salvation; who ventures his body and his soul, for time and for eternity, into the hands of the Lord Jesus. But Christianity is a practical system; regulating the whole of our conversation and conduct; and a Christian is one who "walks in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

Such is the religion of Jesus. It is "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and," to its enemies, "terrible as an army with banners." It came at first from heaven as the greatest and most enriching boon of God to man, who, having fallen from his primeval condition, was deprived of the light of the divine favour, and stripped of the beauties of holiness; but it has been

made, at different times, to assume forms more calculated to excite aversion, dislike, and hatred, than to win man over to the obedience of faith. Christianity has been disgraced by the persecuting spirit of its professors. History and observation may be adduced in proof, that many bearing the Christian name have been covetous, ambitious, and impure. There have been professing Christians, who have violated the obligations of truth, justice, and honesty in the business and transactions of life. We have seen professors of religion making high pretensions to spirituality of mind, and yet as worldly-minded as their neighbours; rising early, sitting up late, and eating the bread of carefulness. We have seen men professing godliness, making long prayers in the church, introducing religious conversation into every company, and whining about sacred things, whilst they have neglected their secular affairs to the injury of their families and creditors. This is not religion, but the abuse of it; it is directly contrary to the teaching of Christ and his apostles; and it no more disproves the reality of religion, than the existence of the counterfeit disproves the reality of the genuine coin. But still it is turned to bad account, and is most injurious in its tendency and effects. Infidelity is the genuine offspring of Popery. The enormities of the Romish Church have led men to regard the Bible as a fable; Christ as an impostor; and the whole of revealed religion

as a system of fraud and falsehood. Protestantism has given rise to much scandal, and been made the pretext for ungodliness and unrighteousness. The divisions and inconsistencies of the Protestant Church have led men to believe that they might sin with impunity; and to live as if they had no souls, as if there were no hereafter, and as if heaven were a mere delusion and hell a mere chimera. *Christianity in the Bible, and Christianity in life, have been two widely different things.*

The injury sustained by the church of God, from this quarter, surpasses calculation. "The men of the world are keen-eyed and watchful observers of the people of God. And there are very few things which answer their purpose better, than the habitual inconsistencies and the occasional falls of professors. They seize on these with eager satisfaction; they circulate the news wherever they go with the leer of malicious pleasure; and they go on with more heedless indifference in their worldliness, and with more licentious wildness in their profligacy. O, think of this, ye professors of the faith of Jesus! By the inconsistencies of your deportment, you may counteract, effectually and fatally, the salutary operation of all that might tend to awaken and persuade, to soften, convince, and save others. Your influence, when you fail to 'walk uprightly,' is more efficaciously given to the side of the world and of hell, than

if you avowed yourselves infidels, and disowned all connexion with the Saviour. You do more real and extensive injury in the one way than in the other. Instead of winning sinners to Christ, you keep them at a distance from him. You furnish them with their most plausible excuses for disregarding his claims, and neglecting his salvation. You lull them into a false and fatal security. You wrap them up more firmly in the mantle of their own delusions. You send them down to hell with 'a lie in their right hand.' And instead of being able, with a clear conscience, to say, 'Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean,' their soul's perdition may be found, in the records of Heaven, charged to your account."¹

But what is worse even than this, is the toleration of gross immorality in the church. It sometimes happens that professors of religion fall into sins, and still retain a name and place among the people of God. This, however, is an evil which will reach vitally the spiritual interests of the church; and, wherever it exists, it will constitute an effectual obstacle to the revival of the work of God. In the church, it will lessen our estimate of the evil of sin; and in the world, it will give room for the enemies of the cross to triumph. "Let," then, "all who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity;" let

¹ Wardlaw.

Christians watch over each other with fidelity and care ; and let the church be kept pure.

The stronghold of Satan is the inconsistency of the church ; he levies a contribution upon the fold of Christ ; and he extracts the poison of mortality from that which was given for the sustenance of life.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD SHOULD ENLIST THE HEARTY CO-OPERATION OF THE CHURCH.

"LORD, I have invited all,
And I shall
Still invite, still call to thee:
For it seems but just and right
In my sight,
Where is all, there all should be."

GEORGE HERBERT.

It is recorded of St. Gregory, that, when his prince required him to do an action which his conscience could not approve, he replied, "Sire, had I two souls, I might be willing to sacrifice one to serve you; but I have only one soul, and that I am determined to save." This courtier, believing that he had a soul, which must exist in happiness or misery, in heaven or hell, and that for ever, resolved to make the salvation of his soul the object of his chief solicitude. It was a noble resolve; and the example is worthy of imitation. Assuming the facts,—that the existence of man is never to cease, that not only death, but likewise judgment, awaits him, that everlasting happiness or misery must be his doom, it will hardly be denied, that we ought to

“work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” and “give diligence to make our calling and election sure.”

But while religion enjoins a deep concern for our own salvation, it requires an anxious solicitude and unwearied efforts for the salvation of others. It is not only a personal, but a social thing. As heads of families, we are to bless our households; present the morning and evening sacrifice; enforce religion with a father's dignity, or a mother's tenderness; bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and see that our servants have the opportunity of searching the Scriptures, hearing the word, and working out their salvation. As members of the community, we are to press our time, our talents, and our influence into the service of the Lord our righteousness, to magnify his word, and display the riches of his grace. As citizens of the world, we are to breathe universal good-will to men; and, by supporting Bible Societies, Missionary Associations, and Sunday School Institutions, seek the evangelization of the whole world.

The world, however, can only be added to the church by the almighty power, the omnipotent grace of the Holy Spirit. The illumination of the understanding, the conviction of the judgment, the subjugation of the will, the regeneration of the heart, the full salvation of the soul, and our preservation

from falling, must be ascribed to the Lord the Spirit. Both with respect to the conversion of one and many, it may be affirmed, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."* But while it is the special and peculiar work of God the Holy Ghost to convert men from sin to holiness, yet the church may be instrumentally employed in this work. The resources of the church which are available for this object, and which ought to be consecrated to this service, are "the truth," example, prayer, labour, and worldly good.

The force of truth is the chief means to be used in the conversion of the world. "For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire."† The warfare in which the church is engaged is not carnal, but spiritual; it is carried on in the world by the light of truth, and the burning of conviction. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things."‡ "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and

* Zechariah iv. 6.

† Isaiah ix. 5.

‡ Psalm xlv. 3, 4.

bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."* It is not by the force of arms, or the glitter of the spear; it is not by the precepts of philosophy, or the powers of oratory; it is not by the wisdom of legislation, or the enactments of law, but by the preaching of the word, and the outpouring of the Spirit, that the kingdom of Christ is to be established in the world. The dominion of Christ over the world of matter, is exercised by physical force; but the dominion of Christ over the world of mind, is maintained by moral power. The understanding, the judgment, the will, the conscience, and the affections of men are not controlled by fate, predestination, and necessity, but by "the truth as it is in Jesus." The subjects of this kingdom are not mere machines, but moral agents; they are a willing people. And when the kingdom of our God and his Christ shall be universally established in the world, then "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;"† and the truth shall exercise a master control over the hearts of men, and the nations of the world. Let us then preach the Gospel; let us offer the blessings of pardon, adoption, sanctification, and eternal life; let us point to the cross where man's guilt was expiated, and bid the contrite sinner rely upon the Redeemer's intercession; and this simple preaching of the Gospel

* 2 Corinthians x. 4, 5.

† Habakkuk ii. 14.

will steal upon the thoughtless, awe the irreverent, instruct the ignorant, reclaim the wicked, heal the broken-hearted, and hasten the glory of the latter day.

This preaching of the word is exclusively confined to public teachers of the Gospel; but the force of exhortation may be employed by private members of the church. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come." A word, spoken in season, has often been owned of God for producing the happiest results. Let us then warn the thousands around us to flee from the wrath to come, who are perishing for lack of that knowledge which we have the ability to communicate, and dying for want of that bread and water of life to which we can direct their views. Who knoweth whether we may be the minister of light to the ignorant, of liberty to the captive, of life to the dead? Let no man try to excuse his inaction; for no man is too inconsiderable to augment the triumphs of the Gospel, and to be instrumental in converting the sinner from the error of his way.

Whether publicly taught or privately addressed, the revealed truth of God is the means of human salvation; and if this fail, it is not to be expected that any other means would awaken us to a sense of the importance of eternal things. Startling and strange as this proposition may appear, it is undoubtedly true; and they who regard not Moses, the

prophet, and Christ, the Son of God, would not regard an angel from heaven, or a departed spirit fetched back again from the invisible world. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." * God has blessed us with the Bible, the ministry of reconciliation, and the secret strivings of his Spirit; and if all these means are lost upon us, no other means would reclaim us! God himself *will not*,—nay, *cannot save us*, that is, in harmony with the attributes of his nature, and the principles of his government. If we reject Moses and Christ, we place ourselves beyond the hope of recovery and the possibility of salvation; and we must inherit the bitterness of unavailing remorse, and the horrors of eternal death. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." †

The conversion of the world is to be effected by *the power of example*. Assimilation is a general law of the universe. The habits, if not the instincts, of animals are copied from others of the same species. But man especially is moulded and fashioned by the spirit and conduct of others; and men are perpetually assimilating themselves to one another. The order of the natural world is preserved by the operation of matter upon matter; and the order of the moral

* Luke xvi. 31.

† Acts iv. 12.

world is maintained by the action of mind upon mind. Minds possess the mysterious power of assimilation ; and morals are often transcripts of others ; one man exerting an influence upon another either for good or evil. " Evil communications corrupt good manners ; " but good example stems the torrent of iniquity, and promotes holiness among men. This moral process is always going on ; we are continually assimilating ourselves to others, and others to ourselves ; and we cannot escape the silent influences by which we are surrounded, and which affect us so much both for good and evil.

This principle of assimilation, which is so efficacious, should be consecrated to the service of the Redeemer, and used for the accomplishment of his redeeming plans. There should be combined with the faithful preaching of God's word, the holy living of God's people. Nothing can be more vital or important in order to the awakening and conversion of sinners. When this is not the case with individuals or societies, we cannot reasonably anticipate any large measure of success ; but, on the contrary, we may expect the proverb to be thrown in our teeth, " Physician, heal thyself." But, when there is personal and social consistency ; when the truth of God is recommended, not only in words, but by the exhibition of its power in the life, then, under the blessing of God, it makes a way with efficacy to the hearts

of men. The salvation of the world greatly depends upon the conduct of the church. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."* "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."† The renunciation of sin and the practice of holiness is the duty of all who name the name of Christ; and never does religion exert a more powerful influence than when it is seen in "the holy conversation and godliness," in the sterling uprightness and piety, combined with the truth, and justice, and mercy, and amiableness of the children of God, in converting sinners from the error of their way. Let Christians only live the Gospel; let them "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things;" let their conduct agree with their profession; and "then transgressors will be taught," and "sinners will be converted." Who can tell the blessed effects in families and in the world, which may result from the eloquence of a holy example and consistent life? How many a husband has been won

* Matthew v. 13.

† 1 Peter ii. 11, 12.

to Christ by the "chaste conversation of the wife?" How many children have been brought to Christ by the holy living of godly parents? How many thousands have been "won over to the obedience of faith" by the piety of the saints? But let Christians, on the other hand, profess one thing and do another; let them cherish sinful principles, and indulge in sinful practices; let them be betrayed into unwatchfulness of spirit and irregularity of conduct; and then the infidel will scoff, the witling will sneer, the irreligious will be hardened, and the world will still lie in wickedness.

The importunity of prayer may be employed in the conversion of the world. Prayer is always considered to be useless by those who lean to their own understanding, and are wise in their own conceits. The metaphysician indulges in speculations on the nature of spirit; he tells us that God is a being, so pure, so spiritual, so impassible, and so incapable of feeling, that it is impossible for us to commune with him in prayer; and the philosopher affirms that nature operates so uniformly, and by such established laws, that our prayers and supplications can be of no avail. But surely the communion of spirit with spirit is as consonant to the dictates of reason as Scripture. The Author of nature, it must be admitted, can control the operations of nature. And what sentiment is there more frequently and forcibly

set forth in the word of God, than the necessity and efficacy of the prayers of the church, whether they are offered up for ourselves or others? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

This is illustrated in the case of individuals. There was Jacob, who wrestled with the angel all night; and, the next day, he met his brother in peace. There was Moses, who conversed with God face to face; and his enemies were subdued before him. There was David, who was a man of prayer; and the Lord, who heard him, delivered him out of all his troubles. There was Daniel, who prayed three times a day; and he was preserved in the den of lions. There were the three Hebrew children, who worshipped the God of their fathers; and they walked unhurt in the midst of the fiery furnace. Prayer has been connected with great and manifold advantages with respect to individuals.

But we must view the subject upon a larger scale. It was while the church at Antioch were waiting on the Lord and fasting, that the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." If the Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, it was when the disciples "were all with one accord in one place," waiting and praying for his descent. The rich and comprehensive donation of the Holy Spirit, so essen-

* James v. 16.

tial to the conversion of the world, is promised in answer to prayer. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."* The Spirit of grace and supplication, in every period of the world, has been the precursor of success.

Prayer, indeed, touches the only spring which can possibly insure the salvation of mankind. It is not eloquence that is wanted, "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" but the praying spirit and the supplicating heart. Eloquence may move man; but prayer can move God. Eloquence may fill the church with the inspirations of human genius; but prayer can fill the church with the presence and power of God. It is through the medium of prayer that the weakness of man prevails with the Almighty. "The prayer of faith" is the only power to which Jehovah will yield: he looks with jealousy upon every other power; but he regards this as a confession of our helplessness and dependence, and as an acknowledgment of his power and grace,—as an appeal to him, the greatest and best of beings.

The conversion of the world is to be accomplished by *the consecration of effort*. Man is invested with high and even awful capacities both for good and evil. The physical powers—the tongue, the eyes

* John iv. 10. Compare with John vii. 37, 39.

and ears, the hands and feet—may be used in the service of God, or employed as the instruments of unrighteousness. The intellectual faculties—the understanding, judgment, memory, imagination, and reason—may be used in glorifying God and benefitting man, or employed in dishonouring God and destroying the souls of men. Our talents may be not only buried in the earth, or idly employed, but they may be put to the best or worst uses.

Means and opportunities of doing good are placed within the reach of all. Men of all ages and in all conditions may find work to do. May not some prepare to go forth as public teachers of that Gospel which “is the power of God unto salvation?” May not others take stations of usefulness in our Sunday Schools, and teach the rising generation that word which has God for its author, truth for its substance, and salvation for its end? May not some employ the gift of holy conversation in the intercourse of life, for the purpose of instructing the ignorant, reclaiming the wicked, and saving souls from death? May not others visit the sick, carry out Bibles, and circulate tracts? Personal service must be rendered. Men of rank, influence, and property often substitute the service of others; but the substitution, like the offering of Cain, will be rejected. We are all stewards of the manifold gifts of God; we cannot transfer our talents and

responsibilities to others; and God will at length say, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

It is a principle in the government of God,—a principle developed both in providence and grace,—to bless man by man. God is the author of good; and man is the minister of good. "God giveth the increase," while one "planteth" and another "watereth." If the sick are visited, the destitute relieved, and the fatherless and widow comforted and delivered, man is the agent. If the ignorant are instructed, the profligate reclaimed, and the foolish made wise unto salvation, man is the instrument. If "the everlasting Gospel is preached to every nation, and kindred, and tongue; and people," it is not by the ministry of angels, but the ministry of men, "subject to like passions as we are." Nor is this the result of caprice, but the arrangement of wisdom. It gives birth to some of the richest feelings of which the human heart is capable; it accords with our views of fitness and propriety, to be helped by men who are partakers of our nature and placed in our circumstances; and it is calculated to produce the most suitable impressions of the divine excellence on the minds of fallen creatures. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* While all

* 2 Corinthians iv. 7.

men may be the instruments of good to others, the people of God, especially, are dispensers of the bounties of his providence and the blessings of his grace; and they may adopt the language of an early apologist of Christianity, and say to the world, "Were we to retire from you, you would be astonished at your own desolation; we should leave you little but your temples and your gods." Were Christians to be taken out of the world, no mind can adequately describe or conceive the lengths and breadths of that desolation and misery, which would be sustained by all classes and conditions of society.

The contribution of property may be used in the conversion of the world. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."* "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."† Though the earth, however, is given to the children of men, yet the circumstances of human life have ever been greatly diversified; there has always been an unequal distribution of good and evil in the present world; and while some have been involved in the distresses and destitution of poverty, others have proudly displayed the distinctions of wealth. But whether we may be placed in the humbler walks of life, or among the higher classes of society, God reserves to himself a claim

* Psalm xxiv. 1.

† Psalm cxv. 16.

upon our worldly substance, and imposes upon us the obligation of giving according to our means: he requires and commends the widow's mite, as well as the offerings of the rich. But where much is given, much is required; and, in such cases, the rule of distribution is to be not narrow and contracted, but large and liberal. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."* A tenth of all was required under the law; and the weekly offering under the Gospel could not be a smaller contribution. A large and liberal benevolence is often enjoined upon us in the word of God. The motives to Christian liberality, addressed to our gratitude, and derived from the example of Christ, whose coming into the world for the redemption of mankind was the brightest exhibition of pure and disinterested benevolence, are of the most spirit-stirring nature. The doctrine of stewardship is peculiar to the Gospel; and it teaches us that while God is the fountain of all good, he has made creatures the instruments of good to man. Covetousness is placed among the most deadly sins; and it excludes from the kingdom of God. Property is thus the gift of God, and must be consecrated to his service.

But oblations still costlier may be required. At a

* Ecclesiastes xi. 2.

meeting, held for the support of missions to the heathen, a youth about sixteen years of age stepped forward; and, when asked what he was willing to give, replied, "*Myself*." But there was a considerable difficulty in the way; he was the eldest of eight children; his mother was a widow, and left to struggle hard with distress. At length, it was determined to refer the matter to her. "Can you," it was asked, "give up your son to be a missionary?" The poor woman, quite overwhelmed, and with tears in her eyes, said, "What am I, that I should be called to this honour? that I should have a son who is willing to engage as a missionary for Christ? Let him go!" He went, and he nobly fought, and he nobly fell; and, among many other things, in his dying moments, he said, "Tell my brother not to be discouraged by my death, and that I found an early grave in India. I rejoice exceedingly that I gave up myself to this work; and I would rather die for Christ in India, than live in England." His brother next offered himself; and when the case was again referred to the widowed mother, she said, "Let him go; and may God go with him!" Now we may not be called upon, as children, to render such self-denying services, and, as parents, to present such costly sacrifices; but we are called upon to render our offerings of Christian liberality.

"And who then is willing to consecrate his service

this day unto the Lord?"* The field of culture is the world. The labourers in the field are few. The means of enlightening and saving mankind are placed in our hands; and God expects us to be faithful to our trust. The truth, example, prayer, exertion, property must all be put into requisition. The world are perishing; and shall we be indifferent to their claims? Men are crying, "Come over and help us;" and shall we turn a deaf ear to their cries? Earth and hell are putting forth their mightiest efforts to destroy; and shall we refuse our utmost exertions to save? "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"† "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."‡

If we enter into the spirit of our duty, and use the means in our hands, we may rest assured that our "labour will not be in vain in the Lord." Should we succeed in the conversion of but *one sinner*, the acquisition would infinitely repay all our anxiety and toil. For, in comparison with one rational, redeemed, immortal creature,—the creature of reason, the subject of redemption, and the heir of immortality,—the whole assemblage, the bright and beautiful abyss of created worlds sink into insignificance, if not into

* 1 Chronicles xxix. 5.

† Haggai i. 4.

‡ Judges v. 23.

absolute nothingness. But the salvation of *a world of sinners* will be the blessed result.

Let not small beginnings cause us to relax in our efforts to do good. For how often have we seen the greatest effects result from the smallest beginnings, and the most unpromising appearances !

A pious monk at Wittenberg, the son of a forger-master, is told that an indulgence-merchant is making a great noise at Vürzen ; and, roused to indignation, he exclaims, " Please God, I'll make a hole in his drum." One day, when seated in the confessional, several citizens come before him, confessing the grossest immoralities ; and, when rebuked, appeal to their letters of indulgence, giving them licence to commit sin with impunity. Regardless of this plea, he refuses absolution, preaches repentance, and brings down upon him the fury of the merchant. He has no thought of reforming the church, and no desire of becoming a Reformer. But still this circumstance was the occasion of the Reformation. That monk was Martin Luther, at whose call Christendom awoke from the slumber of ages, and the church was purged from errors and corruptions which were destroying the souls of men.

At an old manor-house, beautifully situated in a sheltered valley, a child was ushered into the world, so feeble and delicate, that the attendants, who had been dispatched for medical aid, were astonished to

find it living on their return. At an early period of life, he was sent to school; but, like many other boys who have risen to eminence, he was but a dull and inattentive scholar. A very simple occurrence, however, led him to apply himself with diligence to his studies; and, in a short time, he not only mastered almost every branch of abstract and dialectic science, but made some of the profoundest discoveries in the department of nature and art. But his most magnificent discovery was the law of gravitation. It was during a period of retirement at the old manor-house, that the idea first entered his mind. Sitting one day in the garden, he observed an apple fall from a neighbouring tree; and reflecting on the principle of gravitation, by which it was brought to the earth, he discovered that wonderful law, which reveals the system of the universe. That child was Sir Isaac Newton, the great luminary of knowledge, and the faithful interpreter of nature.

A youth at Cambridge, who had obtained honourable distinction, resolved to sustain his reputation by writing a prize Latin essay on the question:—"Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?" The materials collected for the essay convinced him of the enormous iniquity of buying and selling human beings, overwhelmed him with anguish, and gave birth to a Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. After a twenty years' struggle, the Magna Charta of


Africa was completed ; the wrongs of the Negro race were redressed ; and the slave trade, "the execrable sum of all villanies," was abolished. That youth was Thomas Clarkson, the glory of his species, who achieved a work, the noblest, the most disinterested, and the most benevolent, which the world has ever witnessed.

The wife of an humble tradesman, in London, had a son, who at his birth was apparently destitute of life. By the tender assiduities of a faithful nurse, the expiring flame of life in that infant was happily preserved. His mother dedicated him to God, and, in early life, taught him the history of the Old and New Testaments, by means of some Dutch tiles on the chimney of the room where they usually sat. That child was Philip Doddridge, who became a most useful minister in the church of Christ, and the author of "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," as well as several other most important and valuable works.

A printer, residing at Gloucester, while on business in the suburbs of the city, was struck with the degraded condition of the children ; and, being assured that the scene on the Lord's-day was much worse, engaged four women who taught school during the week, to teach the Bible and Catechism on the Sabbath-day. The plan succeeded beyond expectation ; similar schools were soon established through the

land ; and they have multiplied, at home and abroad, until three millions of children are now under religious instruction. The Bible is not only read but taught ; and we cannot but regard this as the most important part of the system. Hymns are sung, and sometimes committed to memory, which contain the most simple and affecting views of God, and the things of God. Catechisms are taught, in which the truths and duties of religion are digested into brief summaries. These are stored in the memory ; and, in after life, when a stronger light breaks in upon the mind, these indented characters stand forth in its irradiations. That printer was Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday-schools ; the first and most important institution of the present day for the benefit of the rising generation.

The eighteenth century was the era of a second reformation in the church. A man, born in a small and obscure village, destitute of the external advantages of wealth and power, and brought out of his obscurity by a series of the most extraordinary circumstances, erected the sacred standard of the cross in our own country. Hosts of opposition gave way before the triumphs of truth ; churches, unsound in doctrine, unscriptural in experience, unholy in conduct, and lax in discipline, were reformed ; and multitudes were converted from the error of their way. This revival of apostolical Christianity in the



hurch and the world rapidly spread; the grain of mustard-seed grew and became a great tree; congregations were gathered, societies were formed, and schools were established for the benefit of the rising generation. A visible, living, active church was organized; men, at home and abroad, reposed under its shadow; islands and continents were blessed with its ministry and institutions; and now its field is the world. The founder of this system, after a life of unexampled labours and usefulness, sank gradually beneath the horizon, exclaiming, "The best of all is, GOD IS WITH US!" That man was John Wesley, one of the principal moral lights of our world, and one of the truest benefactors of his species.

Let not then small beginnings and unpromising appearances discourage us in our attempts to convert the world. The conversion of one sinner proves that every sinner may be converted; and, however inadequate the means which are employed may appear in the eyes of the world, yet the battle shall be fought, and the victory won; the work shall be accomplished, and the success achieved: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." *

* Psalm xxii. 27.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE LATTER DAY IS
NOT MERE ILLUSION, BUT THE SOBER CERTAINTY
OF TRUTH DIVINE.

“O THOU afflicted, beaten with the storm, destitute of consolation !
Behold, I lay thy stones in cement of vermillion,
And thy foundations with sapphires :
And I will make of rubies thy battlements ;
And thy gates of carbuncles ;
And the whole circuit of thy walls shall be of precious stones.
And all thy children shall be taught by Jehovah ;
And great shall be the prosperity of thy children.
In righteousness shalt thou be established :
Be thou far from oppression ; yea, thou shalt not fear it ;
And from terror ; for it shall not approach thee.”

LOWTH'S ISAIAH.

THE final and complete triumph of the church is a theme at which the mind is always ready to kindle. To think of the highly flourishing state of the Christian interest before the end of time ; the banishment of ignorance and the diffusion of knowledge, the suppression of vice and the promotion of virtue, the cessation of misery and the advancement of happiness : To think of that period when the wastes of the church will be repaired, her wounds healed, her enemies subdued, and her converts multiplied : To

think of the church when the Jews shall be brought in with "the fulness of the Gentiles,"—when Jew and Gentile shall harmoniously acknowledge one general Saviour, and crown him Lord of all; is it not almost overwhelming in the bare anticipation? Cradled in the storm, schooled in affliction, and opposed by persecution, the church will at length "arise and shine." The fact, that there will be a millennium, we shall endeavour to establish; but the state of the church in her millennial glory we shall not attempt largely to describe. "Millennium" is derived from the Latin words *mille anni*, meaning "a thousand years;" and it is used to designate the period, during which the church will present that spectacle of beautiful harmony and universal triumph which she is destined to display.

Men may theorize, philosophize, and speculate about the future; but there is a veil which cannot be drawn aside,—there is a curtain which cannot be uplifted. Many indeed have been the theories started by various leaders; and each leader has had his own sect of followers. The first theory is the personal reign of Christ. It is held that Christ will appear in person, make the earth to tremble, shake kingdoms, and reign over all the nations of the world. Allied to this theory, is the literal resurrection of the saints. It is affirmed that while the wicked will continue in their graves, the righteous will rise from the

dead, and live with Christ a thousand years before "the end of all things." The national restoration of the Jews to their own land, is held by many who reject these views. It is believed that the Jews, who have been scattered through all nations, will not only be converted, but assemble together, assume their separate form of national existence, and again inherit the land of their fathers. The extraordinary inspiration and the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit are again, in the opinion of some, to be restored to the church. It is held that, before the coming of Christ, and during the millennial glory, the splendid gifts of tongues, healing, prophecy, and miracles, which were peculiar to the apostles and their immediate successors, will be conferred and exercised. These questions are highly speculative, fraught with innumerable difficulties, and not sustained by sufficient and satisfactory evidence.

The only rational and scriptural view of the latter-day glory is, that the Gospel will be preached to all nations; that the enemies of truth and righteousness will be either subdued or destroyed; that the knowledge of the truth will be universally diffused; and that the blessings of salvation will be everywhere enjoyed. To describe the glory of the latter day would require more than a prophet's prescience, and more than an angel's tongue; but to sketch a brief outline of the teaching of Scripture, on this subject, will not be a difficult task.

Leaving mere speculation to others, we may venture, with unaffected diffidence, to enumerate some particulars, which will, in all probability, be included in the millennial or latter-day glory.

Ignorance will be dispelled; and knowledge will be increased. Now "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." Ignorance, which is destructive of the dignity, the virtue, the happiness, the usefulness, and the soul of man, prevails through all nations and conditions of men. But then "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Knowledge, in general, will be diffused; and religious knowledge, in particular, will be increased. Then art will perfect her attractions; science will develope her discoveries of wonder; literature will exhaust her stores of learning; while religion will go forth in her fair pre-eminence, piercing the darkest recesses of nature, and shining around the world in the illuminations of her meridian glory.

Sin will be destroyed; and holiness will be promoted. Now men are "shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin." Pride and ambition, covetousness and envy, malice and revenge, dwell in the heart. Intemperance and impurity, oppression and fraud, cruelty and violence, mark the conduct. But then, "the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," will be found in the hearts and mani-

fested in the lives of men. Whether every sinner in the world will be converted, and whether all sin in the heart will be destroyed, are questions which the day of the Lord will declare; but we are warranted in asserting, that the destruction of sin and the advancement of holiness will be beyond all precedent and all expectation.

Misery will cease ; and happiness will be diffused.

Now men are miserable, because they are vicious; vice and misery go hand in hand. "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes."* But then men will be happy, because they will be virtuous; virtue and happiness cannot be separated. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."† Happiness without holiness, would be a violation of the moral laws of the universe. The blessedness of the Deity results from the absolute perfection of his nature. And his intelligent creatures resemble him in happiness, just in proportion as they resemble him in holiness. What sources of enjoyment, therefore,

* Romans iii. 13-18.

† Isaiah xxxii. 17.

will be opened when the love of God and the love of man will be the ruling principles in the heart; when wars and rumours of wars will cease to the ends of the earth; when equity, meekness, and benevolence, will guide and regulate the intercourse of social life; and when the whole human race will "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God!"

The dominion of Satan will be subverted; and the kingdom of Christ will be established. Now Satan is "the god of this world;" "the prince of the power of the air;" "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;" and men are "taken captive by him at his will." Satan and Christ are the heads of two opposite empires;—the one the empire of darkness and sin; the other the empire of light and holiness; while the whole human family are divided by their sway. But then Satan, the ruling spirit of delusion, will "fall as lightning from heaven;" his power will be broken; his kingdom will be crumbled into ruins; and he himself will no more deceive the nations; while the kingdom of Christ will be universal,—extending from shore to shore, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth; and perpetual,—it will be an everlasting kingdom; it will never be taken away to be given to another people, but the saints of the Most High shall continually possess it.

Systems of false religion and speculative impiety will be abolished; and "the faith which was once

delivered unto the saints" will be maintained inviolate. Now there are "strongholds, imaginations, and high things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God." The Jew, the heathen, the false prophet and the beast, the atheist, the blaspheming infidel, and the disputer of this world, band themselves together "against the Lord, and against his anointed." But then false religion, and scepticism, or philosophic irreligion, will be no more. The empire of darkness and despotism will be smitten by the hand of God with a stroke that shall sound through the universe. The enmity of Judaism shall be slain, and the long disinherited Jew steal away silently to his Messiah, weeping as he goes. The throes and struggles of paganism will everywhere be felt, idols thrown down, temples demolished, and oracles struck dumb. Whole kingdoms which have been deceived by the false prophet, will start from their slumbers, awake from their depression, and the anti-Christian tyranny of Mohammedanism cease for ever. Anti-Christ, which claims the qualities and perfections of the Divine Being, will be consumed "with the Spirit" of the Lord, and destroyed "with the brightness of his coming." Atheism, well knowing its weakness in argument, will at length retire from the field. Infidelity is an evil which will be of short duration. "It has no individual subsistence given it in the system of prophecy. It is not a

BEAST; but a mere putrid excrescence of the papal beast; an excrescence which, though it may diffuse death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet shall die along with it." Its enormities will hasten its overthrow. It is in no shape formed for perpetuity. Rationalism, with its ally, infidelity, will be overthrown. Then will come the jubilee of man, the Sabbath of the world, and the millennium of the church. The tabernacle of God will be with men; Satan will be bound; and a ransomed and renovated world will live and "reign with Christ a thousand years." "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." *

But the church will be *glorious within* as well as *without*. Christians will be all of one heart and soul. Prejudices will cease; jealousies will expire; and alienations of affection will die away for ever. "The envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy

* Revelation xx. 1-3.

Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.”* “Holiness to the Lord” will also be inscribed on all the statutes, the ordinances, and the subjects of Christ’s kingdom. “In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.”†

Such will be the glory of the church in her millennial state. The church will prevail over all opposition, and triumph in the moral renovation of the world, while peace and righteousness will dwell within her borders. Without further particularizing, we now proceed to argue the point. The fact that the church *will be glorious without and within* IS SURE; but *what that glory will be is in a great measure hidden from our view.*

The conversion of the world to the faith of Jesus Christ is not a matter of mere speculation or dark and uncertain conjecture, *but rests upon the firm and broad basis of eternal truth.* No sooner had man transgressed the laws and incurred the displeasure of his Maker, than that fearful struggle which was to

* Isaiah xi. 13.

† Zechariah xiv. 20, 21.

manifest itself between the Son of God and the prince of darkness, with its glorious and successful issue, was clearly foretold and strongly marked. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* And it was in reliance upon this promise, and by faith in this anticipated Redeemer of the human race, that the first sinning pair were restored to the favour of heaven. The promise of a Saviour who was to be the seed of Abraham, and the blessing of all nations, was more explicitly renewed to the father of the faithful. "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."† As Jacob approached the close of life, he gathered his sons together that he might bless them; and he foretold that the symbol of political power should not depart from Judah before the advent of the Messiah, and that the people should be gathered to him. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."‡ The universal triumph of his Saviour was still more clearly foretold by the Psalmist, and, with this theme, "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, were ended." "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be

* Genesis iii. 15. † Genesis xii. 3. ‡ Genesis xlix. 10.

continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things : and blessed be his glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with his glory." * Daniel, who was "a man greatly beloved," beheld not only the rise and fall of empires, but prophesied of the coming of the Son of Man, his sacrificial death, and his reign of righteousness and love. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." †

While, however, the advent and reign of the Messiah were foretold by all the prophets, yet they were especially foretold by Isaiah, who has been usually called "the evangelical prophet." The approach of the Messiah is so plainly announced ; his exalted character is so clearly and precisely stated ; and the increase, the grandeur, and the perpetuity of his kingdom, are so beautifully portrayed by this prophet, that we seem to be perusing the writings of an

* Psalm lxxii. 17-19.

† Daniel vii. 13, 14.

evangelist rather than the predictions of a prophet ; and the splendour of the prophetic page seems to brighten into still more glorious history. " And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together : and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."* " The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them ; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing : the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God."† " Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold : all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth."‡ " Arise,

* Isaiah xi. 5-9.

† Isaiah xxxv. 1, 2.

‡ Isaiah xlix. 18.

shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.”* These passages form a part of a sublime and continuous prophecy, depicting the glory of the latter day, and the utter failure of all the persecutions of the church.

Christianity is mighty, and must prevail. The spectacle of the cross is destined to exert a powerful influence upon the whole human family. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”† The perfection of our Saviour’s conquest, and the prostration of his enemies, will precede the end, when the mediatorial kingdom shall be surrendered, “and God shall be all in all.” “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have

* Isaiah lx. 1-5.

† John xii. 32.

put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.”* This is the view taken also in the sublime and impressive Revelation of St. John ; and though we do not pretend to understand its profound mysteries, its lofty symbols, and its beautiful imagery, yet we learn that the victories of Christ and the triumphs of his Gospel are won in the midst of opposition and the discomfiture of his enemies. There he is placed before us as the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. There he is represented as a mighty conqueror, having a sharp, two-edged sword, with which he smiteth the nations, and a rod of iron with which he dasheth in pieces his enemies, while “on his vesture and on his thigh a name is written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” There the enemies arrayed against his rightful claims are subdued, defeated, and conquered ; while heaven, with all her choirs, rolls the triumphant notes and the lofty swell of the last anthem : “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”† These are only samples or specimens of the prophecies of Scripture which refer to the final triumphs of the Redeemer ; and sooner shall the heavens and the earth pass away than one word of prophecy fail of its accomplishment. It is not

* 1 Corinthians xv. 24, 25.

† Revelation xi. 15.

possible for the understanding of man to conceive, or the heart of man to desire, more ample and appropriate ground of security than that which is furnished by the truth and faithfulness of God.

The whole human family are not only *the promised, but the purchased, and therefore the rightful possession of the Son of God*. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth;" and all men are not only the offspring of the same creating hands, and the creatures of the same providential care, but the purchase of the same redeeming grace. The sacrifice of the cross knows no limits but the race itself; it reaches back to the first transgression; it extends forward to the end of time; and it comprehends all nations and generations of the world. Men may set limits to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and surround themselves with enclosures, if they will; but the Gospel sweeps them all away. No geographical boundary, no natural or artificial circumstances, no difference of climate, manners, or language, can stand before the Gospel. Mountains sink, rivers and seas dry up, colours fade away, and the chain of slavery melts before the preaching of the cross. We can carry the Gospel to the shores of classic elegance and ignorant barbarism; we can go with it to him who shivers in the icy regions of the north, and to him who pants beneath the heat of the sun in the sultry regions of the south;

we can apply it equally to the Jew and the Gentile, the wise and the unwise, the bond and the free.

This view of the atonement is supported by the uniform testimony of Scripture. "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."* The remedy is here declared to be as extensive as the evil; and, therefore, if sin be universal, redemption must be universal. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."† "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"‡ The final perdition of men, for whom Christ died, and to whom the Spirit has been given, is here taught; and, therefore, the atonement cannot be confined to those who are saved. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."§ The whole world, *ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου*, is a phrase which cannot here signify a section, or province, or part of the world; or a small, select,

* Romans v. 18.

† Romans xiv. 15.

‡ Hebrews x. 29.

§ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

definite number of the human family ; but it means the whole race of mankind. The beautiful antithesis between "our sins" and "the sins of the whole world," requires this sense ;—the one class denoting believers ; the other class, the opposite, all unbelievers. To these may be added all those passages, which teach that Christ died for all men, which make the salvation or perdition of men turn upon their reception or rejection of the Gospel, and which place the failure of men to obtain salvation to the account of their own will and make it their own fault. The force of the argument, however, from general redemption must be nicely distinguished. It does not follow, because all men are redeemed, that all men **WILL** be saved ; but it does follow, because all men are redeemed, that all men **MAY** be saved. Redemption gives the right, but not the certainty, of actual possession. Actual possession can only be obtained upon the repentance, faith, and holiness of men. But then, when we consider that the repentance, faith, and holiness of men are not only, as we have seen, foretold by the prophets, but provided for, as we shall now see, in the Gospel, and will be brought about by a more ample effusion of the Spirit, our argument is complete, showing not only that the world **MAY** but **WILL** at length be converted to the faith of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is a remedy for the misery of the

world; and, in all respects, it meets the moral condition and wants of man. It finds man ignorant; and it presents him with knowledge. It finds man guilty; and it presents him with pardon. It finds man unholy; and it presents him with an entire renewal. It finds man miserable; and it presents him with comfort. It finds man supine; and it presents him with powerful motives. It finds man dying; and it presents him with life and immortality.


Man is ignorant. The human mind is naturally dark. With regard to knowledge, in general, it is the consequence of instruction, and obtained by slow degrees; and with regard to religious knowledge, in particular, it is only to be learned from the word and Spirit of God. But Jesus Christ is the "true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." By his word he has supplied us with a perfect rule of faith, and an infallible directory of conduct; he has taught us all that it is necessary for us to know, and all that it is necessary for us to do. By his Spirit he opens the eyes of our understanding, that we may discover the meaning and application of the divine word, and softens our hearts to receive its effectual impressions.

Man is guilty. The guilt of sin has taken its abode in every human conscience; and a consciousness of guilt begets alarm and wretchedness in every human bosom. The law of God has been

violated by every human being ; and the penalty of that law must come down upon us in all its fearful extent, unless some one able to mediate between God and his guilty creature, undertake for us. But the Gospel is a revelation of mercy to a lost and ruined world ; a reply to that most interesting and important inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ "God can be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Man is corrupt. The depravity of man is a truth which will not be disputed by any one who believes the Word of God ; and there is not a man in existence who is free from the taint of hereditary corruption. The nature of every man born into the world is prone to evil, and has a bias toward sin. But the Gospel connects with the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the sanctifying agency and the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Through the influences of the Holy Spirit, we may "be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

There are other aspects under which man, in his fallen condition, should be viewed. Ignorance, guilt, and pollution, bring misery, supineness, and death in their train. The consequences, like the principles of evil, are "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."



Man is miserable. "Without God, and without hope in the world," he is restless, anxious, and dissatisfied. How painful are all his recollections of the past; and how gloomy are all his contemplations of the future! But the Gospel opens to us numerous sources of comfort and enjoyment. Here is "peace with God;" here is "joy in the Holy Ghost;" here is freedom from the dominion of sin; here is the testimony of an approving conscience; and here is the assured hope of eternal glory.

Man is supine. He folds his arms to sleep, while death stares him in the face. The avenger of blood is pursuing him, and the voice of mercy cries, "Escape to the mountain;" but he heeds her not. All the motives of reason are insufficient and ineffectual. They play around his depravity, like shadows round the mountain top, without leaving any impression behind. But the Gospel presents motives to rouse the most supine:—motives addressed to our gratitude; "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:"* motives addressed to our prudence and foresight; "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work:"† and motives addressed to our hopes and fears; "He that believeth and is baptized

* John iii. 16.

† John ix. 4.

shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Man is dying. Every individual in existence is only ripening for the tomb. All have within them the seeds of death; all are destined to be victims of the grave. But "life and immortality are brought to light" by the Gospel. The tent is taken down, but the traveller still lives; and the body will be raised again at the last day. Thus the Gospel, under whatever aspect it may be considered, is fitted to our nature and condition.

This fitness is not confined to one age or nation. The labours of our missionaries have furnished some of the most convincing arguments for, and some of the most impressive illustrations of, the suitableness and adaptation of the Gospel to men of every age and clime. A man on the Malabar coast had inquired of heathen priests how he might make an atonement for his sins, and obtain peace of conscience; and he was directed to drive iron spikes through his sandals, and on these to walk four hundred and eighty miles. If, through weakness of body, or loss of blood, he was obliged to stop, he might wait for healing and strength. He undertook the journey; and while he rested under a large shady tree where the Gospel was sometimes preached, one of the missionaries came, and preached in his hearing from these words:

* Mark xvi. 16.

"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The man rose up, threw away his torturing sandals, and exclaimed, "That is what I want: that is what I want!" and he obtained "redemption through the blood" of Christ, "the forgiveness of sins." Thus, while the religion of Jesus meets the case of the conscience-stricken pagan, it leaves no want unprovided for; and it is, therefore, worthy of the acceptation of all men, and will in the end wield the sceptre of universal dominion.

The dispensation which is now passing over us, is "*the ministration of the Spirit;*" and if we consider *the necessity and efficacy of his influences, we shall discover a sure foundation for the faith and hope of the church.* The great promise of the Jewish dispensation was the promise of Christ; but the great promise of the Christian dispensation is the promise of the Spirit. The Jews waited for the coming of Christ; but Christians now wait for the descent of the Spirit. Our Lord encouraged his disciples to expect the gift of the Holy Spirit from a consideration of the imperfect kindness of earthly parents, as contrasted with the infinite goodness of God. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"* When he was about to pour out his soul as an offer-

* Luke xi. 13.

ing for sin, leave his sorrowing disciples, and ascend to his God and their God, to his Father and their Father, he promised the Holy Spirit under the appropriate and endearing character of the Comforter. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." * After his resurrection and ascension, his apostles enjoined repentance and faith, and assured all penitent and believing sinners, that they should "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

This promise of Christ may be viewed both as it respects the church and the world. The Spirit was to be given to the church as a teacher and guide, as a comforter and witness, and as a sanctifying and indwelling Spirit. But the Spirit was to be given for the conversion of sinners, as well as the edification of believers. For this end, he is represented as knocking at the door of our hearts, awakening our consciences, calling forth our spiritual desires, and raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. But while it is readily allowed that Christ died for all, it is boldly denied that the Spirit is given to all, and that all men, therefore, may be saved.

The modern theory puts the limit not on the sacrifice of the Cross, but on the influences of the Spirit. Driven back by a host of assailants, the opponents of general redemption and the salvability of all men

* John xiv. 16.

have taken refuge in a gratuitous assumption. They affirm, with us, that Christ died for all, and that the blessings of salvation are offered to all; but they maintain that the Spirit is not given to all, without whose influences the death of Christ and the promise of salvation are of no avail. The argument, however, against partial redemption, founded upon a view of the wisdom, the justice, the truth, and the grace of God, is equally strong against partial divine influence; and not only so, but the doctrine of Scripture is, that the influences of the Spirit are co-extensive with the death of Christ:—as we are taught that Christ died for all, so are we taught that the Spirit is promised to all. The most remarkable prophecy of the Spirit is expressed in general terms, without any restriction or limitation. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.”* The promise of the Spirit is not of particular, but of general application: “For the promise,” that is, of the Holy Ghost, “is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”† All are called or invited, and all who com-

* Joel ii. 28, 29.

† Acts ii. 39.

ply with the invitation make their "calling and election sure." The Spirit was to be the vice-agent or representative of Christ; his mission was to be to the world; and, therefore, we conclude, that if the advent of Christ was for the salvation of all, and if "the world" denotes the whole assemblage of rational, accountable, and immortal beings that exist upon this little orb which floats in space, the Spirit is sent for the salvation of all. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* The assumption, that the mission and work of the Spirit are at variance with the mission and work of the Son, is not only unscriptural, but impossible and absurd. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be one not only in nature, but in action. The Father and the Son cannot be more loving than the Spirit; "the love of the Spirit" is the love of God, and must, therefore, necessarily be wide as the world and vast as eternity; all his works must be works of mercy, and all his operations must be operations of benevolence.

And here it will be necessary farther to remark two things. The first is: *That we are not to expect the conversion of the world without the influences of*

* John xvi. 7, 8.

the Spirit." "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"* The conversion of individuals and multitudes can only be effected by the "power of the Holy Ghost." At home learning, philosophy, and the influence of example have been tried; and abroad arts and sciences, civilization and commerce have been employed; but they have all been used in vain. The deceitfulness and depravity of the heart have remained the same. The second remark is: *That we are not to despair of the conversion of the world with the influences of the Spirit.* On the day of Pentecost, when "the Spirit was poured out from on high," three thousand souls were converted; and in our own day, when the Spirit has descended upon the church and the world, individuals, families, and even nations have been either convinced of sin or converted to God. The powers of earth and hell cannot withstand the omnipotence and grace of the Holy Spirit; and, when there shall be a larger outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter day, there is every reason to believe all men will be gathered into the fold of Christ. Here, then, is the pledge of final success; here is the power which will overcome or subordinate every other power; and here is the mighty agent in the work of glorifying the church, and regenerating the world.

The church, in every time and place, *has achieved*


* Jeremiah xiii. 23.

successes more ample, and exhibited trophies more splendid, than the world has ever witnessed; and these are to be viewed as pledges of her future glory. The church of the apostles was singularly triumphant. Error, prejudice, and sin gave way before the preaching of the Word. Jewish superstition and heathen licentiousness were renounced. Systems which were supported by rank, defended with subtlety, and recommended by eloquence, were abandoned. Christianity swept away idolatry, with its sanguinary and polluted rites, put an end to polygamy and divorce, abolished human sacrifices and domestic slavery, and improved the manners and morals of every nation where it prevailed. The persecution of fire and the sword, of exile and banishment, of imprisonment, and of death under every form, failed to extinguish the new sect, and scatter the followers of Christ. Multitudes were gathered into the church, among the higher classes of society, and in the humbler walks of life. Men of rank, education, and influence entered the Christian church. There was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; there was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich and honourable counsellor; there was no less a personage than the proconsul of Asia embraced the truth as it is in Jesus; and, at Rome, there were members of the household of faith in the palace of Cæsar. The march of truth was one of glory, conquest, and

privilege, during the life-time of the apostles, and the first four centuries ; and then the glory departed, and a long night of affliction followed, during which the church was covered with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

The morning of the Reformation at length dawned ; and the church prepared for new struggles and new triumphs. Germany, England, France, Spain, Switzerland, and other countries, in whole or part, threw off their allegiance to Rome ; the triple crown was laid in the dust ; and the palmiest days of Christianity again returned. Passing over the revivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we must confine our attention to the condition and prospects of the church in the present day, considered with especial reference to the diffusion of the Gospel, and the salvation of the world. The people of God, at the close of the last and the commencement of the present century, awoke from the slumber of ages, and placed before them as their object the conversion of the world. The prospects before us at the present day are truly sublime, because the effects connect themselves so little with human instrumentality, and so much with God. There is no array of human power ; there are no consultations of worldly policy ; there is no march of crusading armies ; and yet our enemies retreat before us ; encampments are breaking up ; legions are vanquished ; standards are furled ; and the banner of the Cross is planted high in triumph.

But even a sketch of the present state of things cannot be attempted. A few rapid glances of thought must supply the whole. The resources and opportunities of England and America were never so large and ample. France, amidst much moral restlessness, presents an aspect of encouragement and promise ; the Reformed Church can boast of her evangelical clergy and spiritual children ; and, when freed from Popery and infidelity, France will become, with England and America, one of the principal moral regenerators of the world. Germany, notwithstanding all its scepticism and irreligion, has a host of faithful men ; and upon Italy, benighted and afflicted for centuries, the light shines. In Ceylon and Continental India, the Word of God is not bound ; a spirit of inquiry has been aroused among the priests and literati ; several heathens, after instruction and probation, have been received into the church of Christ by the ordinance of baptism ; and Buddhism and Brahminism, supported as they have been for ages by caste, subtlety, poetry, philosophy, and learning, now nod to their final fall. China, containing one third of the entire population of our globe, at length is open for the preaching of the Word, and the circulation of the Scriptures. In the South Seas, "a nation has been born in a day ;" "kings have become nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers ;" and revivals of religion have taken place, which have hardly been



surpassed since the day of Pentecost. Africa, along her western and southern shores, and far away into her interior, has heard the joyful tidings of salvation. Great and effectual doors of usefulness are opening in every direction; and the whole world seems now to be assigned by the providence, as well as by the grace of God, to the church for cultivation and improvement. But time would fail to enumerate the spheres of action, or tell of the labours and successes of our modern Brainerds, Martyns, and Cokes;—zealous and self-denying men of God; who have sacrificed the pleasures of friendship, and the endearments of their country and home, and gone forth, encountering every species of hardship and every extremity of danger, to minister the Gospel of God to the ends of the earth. Past success is the pledge of future glory; “this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world;” and nation after nation shall echo the glad tidings, until mountain and valley shall catch the joyful strain, and all nations join in the general chorus.

“The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain-tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy;
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous hosanna round.”

Such is the argument for the latter-day glory.
The flourishing state of the church before the end

of the world cannot be described or conceived ; but it is absolutely certain. The language of prophecy proclaims its approach. The entire race of mankind belongs to Christ, as the purchase of his death. A remedy has been devised, which is adapted to all the diversified wants, and adequate to the innumerable necessities of men. An influence is exerted which can subdue all things to Christ. The mighty achievements of the church, in ancient and modern times, are pledges and earnest of her final triumph. Here is a sure foundation for the faith and hope of Christians. The most beautiful and ingenious systems of human device perish. The opinions and usages of society change. The literature of one age is superseded by that of another. The fairest productions of mind, genius, imagination, and taste pass away. But truth is changeless and eternal. "God is not a man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent : hath he said, and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?" * The right of possession and the ministration of the Spirit remain in full force. The Gospel spreads with lightning speed ; and the rolling of the distant thunder proclaims, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." †

"Rise, crown'd with light, imperial Salem, rise !
Exalt thy towery head, and lift thy eyes !

* Numbers xxiii. 19.

† Revelation xix. 6.

See a long race thy spacious courts adorn;
 See future sons, and daughters yet unborn,
 In crowding ranks on every side arise,
 Demanding life, impatient for the skies!
 See barbarous nations at thy gates attend,
 Walk in thy light, and in thy temple bend:
 See thy bright altars throng'd with prostrate kings,
 And heap'd with products of Sabæan springs!
 For thee Idume's spicy forests blow,
 And seeds of gold in Ophir's mountains glow.
 See Heav'n its sparkling portals wide display,
 And break upon thee in a flood of day.
 No more the rising sun shall gild the morn,
 Nor evening Cynthia fill her silver horn;
 But lost, dissolv'd in thy superior rays,
 One tide of glory, one unclouded blaze
 O'erflow thy courts: the Light himself shall shine
 Reveal'd, and God's eternal day be thine!
 The seas shall waste, the skies in smoke decay,
 Rocks fall to dust, and mountains melt away;
 But fixed his word, his saving power remains—
 Thy realm for ever lasts, thy own *Messiah* reigns!"

CHAPTER XII.

RULE AND EXCEPTIONS—OBJECTIONS ANSWERED— CONCLUSION.

“LET us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God and keep his commandments : for this is the whole duty of man.”—
SOLOMON.

GENERAL rules admit of particular exceptions ; but the exception does not invalidate the rule. Of this remark we have the most striking examples in the Sacred Writings. There “is none good, save one, that is God.”* This is the rule. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.”† This is the exception. The rule is, that there is none absolutely good, but God. The exception is, that there are men who are good in a comparative and qualified sense. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work : but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God : in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”‡ This is the rule. “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox

* Luke xviii. 19. † Matthew xii. 35. ‡ Exodus xx. 8-10.

fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?"* This is the exception. The rule is, that the Sabbath day is to be hallowed by a cessation from all worldly anxiety and toil. The exception is, that works of mercy and necessity may be done on the Lord's day. "But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."† This is the rule. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things."‡ This is the exception. The rule is, that godliness is great gain in all things. The exception is, that religion may involve many sacrifices.

Now to apply this to the question before us. "There are no invisible members of the church." This is the rule. There are, however, cases in which distance of place, affliction of body, and other circumstances render visible communion with the church impossible or impracticable. These are the exceptions. The rule is, that every member of the mystical body of Christ ought to be a member of the visible church of God. The exceptional cases are, those in which the obligation of the rule is annulled or modified by circumstances over which we have no control. Let us urge the rule, and specify the exceptions.

Let us urge the rule. Believers and penitents, it is equally your duty and privilege, not only to give

* Luke xiv. 5. † 1 Timothy iv. 8. ‡ Philippians iii. 8.

your "own selves to the Lord," but to the church, "by the will of God." In the name of God, we now summon you to consider whether one thing can be alleged against your separation from the world, and your connexion with the church. The case is summarily this:—God has a church in the world; Christ is the sole head of the church; the church is composed of spiritual members; it is a visible society; the bond of union is love; the duty of fellowship is imperative and fraught with the highest advantages; the abuse of the Divine institution is no argument against its use; the church is aggressive; and will at length be millennial and universal. We put it to you, what course your conscience and interest alike invoke you to pursue. Can you frame any reasonings to justify your continuance in the world? Are there any allegations you can urge why you should not make a public profession of religion, why you should not share the reproach of Christ, and why you should not enjoy the privileges and immunities of the church? Produce them, if you are able; and let us learn by what strange process of argument it is, that evil is preferred to good, the counsel of the ungodly to the society of Christians, and the friendship of the world to the friendship of God? Reasons you cannot assign, but objections you may urge, and they must be considered.

Let us specify the exceptions. You will ask, Is

the rule absolute? May not a man be a Christian, and not united to any church? The answer is, that there are exceptions to the rule; but they are comparatively few; and it is most dangerous to plead them as precedents. "He that feareth God and worketh righteousness," in the dark places of the earth, is accepted of God; but, in his case, union with the church of Christ cannot be. A man may be immured in a dungeon, or exiled from his country for righteousness' sake; or a man may be thrown upon one of the islands of the Pacific, or be led far away into the interior of Africa, where the name of Christ is not known; and yet with the Bible in his hand he may "be wise unto salvation." The fuel of affliction may be heaped upon a man for weeks, and months, and years, consuming his health, and strength, and spirits, so that he cannot "go up to the house of the Lord." There are cases of morbid nervousness, in which the spirit is loaded with an unaccountable and irresistible oppression, haunted with imaginary phantoms, seizes upon whatever is discouraging, and turns aside from whatever is calculated to comfort and cheer. We have one example in Scripture of a sinner saved at the eleventh hour, that none might despair; and we have only one example, that none might presume. This was the dying thief. He sought and obtained mercy, when his spirit was trembling on the verge of

eternity. All these are exceptional cases. There may be others ; but it is a fearful hazard to allow our salvation to hang upon a mere exception to a standing law. The Society of Friends can hardly be classed under this head. It is true, indeed, that they set aside the authorized form of initiation into the church of God, and the appointed symbol of communion with the church of Christ,—a most perilous thing ; but still there are forms which distinguish them as a church.

There are, however, more spurious than genuine exceptions to the rule. “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”* This may be applied not merely to delays in religion which are dangerous, but to isolation from the church which cannot be justified on rational or scriptural grounds. The objections urged are various ; they refer to the credentials, the teaching, and the conduct of the church ; and, considering the question in its widest range, objectors may be properly distinguished into three classes :—**SCEPTICS**, **WORLDLINGS**, and **PROFESSORS**. Let us give each a fair hearing and a full answer.

THE SCEPTIC.—“The magnitude of creation,” it is affirmed, “cannot fail to overwhelm us with a sense of our individual insignificance. When we consider the heavens, what is man that he should presume to

* Luke xiv. 18.

think of God, or hope to be regarded by him? Men are but mere atoms in the mass of beings; and to suppose themselves noticed by the Great Supreme, either in judgment or in mercy, is a presumptuous and unfounded conceit. The Bible is to be regarded as a fable; Christ as a blasphemer; and the whole of revealed religion as a system of falsehood and imposture, invented by the crafty and imposed upon the credulous. The church is a human, and not a Divine Institution."

Man, whether considered in his individual capacity, or as the member of a community, occupies a high place, when viewed in his just proportions on the scale of the universe. The comparison of man with the multitude of the heavenly host should produce, not atheistic unbelief, but adoring wonder and heartfelt gratitude. For, magnify the works of God as you may; consider the sun when he goeth forth in his might; view the earth, with its fulness of being and blessing; see the ocean lifting up its waves in turbulent grandeur and resistless power; take the wings of an angel, and fly to distant worlds; make every star a sun; surround every sun with planets; people every planet with inhabitants; and endow every inhabitant with life, intelligence, and immortality; what is there in all this astonishing pomp and magnificence to degrade man from his rank in creation? The world above, beneath, and around is material, finite, and, with all

its glory, will shortly pass away. But man is immaterial, infinite in his capacities and desires, immortal, and will exist for ever. The splendour of the sun, the beauty of the earth, the sublimity of the ocean, and the extent and grandeur of the heavens, are not to be compared with the understanding, the judgment, the memory, the imagination, the reason, the will, the conscience, the passions, the affections, and the immortality of man. The sun knows not his splendour, nor the earth its beauty, nor the ocean its sublimity, nor the heavens their grandeur. But the human mind thinks, judges, remembers, combines, argues, chooses, approves, condemns, loves, hopes, joys, comprehends ten thousand visible objects, and grasps the invisible realities of the world to come. And even supposing that there are other worlds inhabited beside our own, this serves to elevate rather than degrade man, showing, as it does, that he is a part of a great whole, a member of an innumerable family, and a link in the mighty chain of being. The objection is thus flung back upon the objector; and the vastness of nature, the plurality of worlds, and the multitude of their inhabitants only prove "the greatness of man."

There is another aspect of the question, founded upon a view of the mercy, as contrasted with the majesty of God. The eternal Word stretched out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth,

brought forth the mountains and poured the sea into its bed; but he "*rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth; and his delights were with the sons of men.*" While the Almighty Creator of man "tellethe the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names," he stoops so low, in his condescending compassions, as to "*heal the broken in heart, and bind up their wounds.*" These are the only just and unexceptionable sentiments which come home to the heart, after a survey of the heavens; and when, from viewing the ample cope of the firmament, we turn our attention to man, we are still more affected by the mercy than the majesty of God. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" * The multiplicity of worlds, instead of favouring the conclusion, that man and his welfare are unimportant, refutes it by showing that the Creator and Lord of all prefers, as the field of his cares and beneficence, *the intelligent and moral world*, rather than *the material universe*. But while all men are the objects of the divine regard, "the humble and contrite" are still more especially the objects of the divine compassion. The world is remembered and visited for good; but the church is still more highly privileged. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, more than *all the dwellings of Jacob.*" †

* Psalm viii. 3. 4.

† Psalm lxxvii. 2.

The Bible is not a fable ; Christ was not an impostor ; and religion is not a system of fraud and falsehood. The evidences both of the Mosaic and Christian institutes are clear and incontrovertible ; and they may be properly regarded as historical, external, and internal or collateral. There is historical evidence, arising from the agreement between sacred and profane history. There is external evidence, arising from miracles and prophecy. There is internal and collateral evidence of the truth of the Bible, arising from the harmony of its subjects, the sublimity of its truths, the purity of its morals, the equity of its precepts, the benevolence of its spirit, the suitableness of its blessings, and the extent of its triumphs. The authority of Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, rests upon evidence which ought to convince the most sceptical and unbelieving ; and we know that " we have not followed cunningly devised fables."* The objection, here again, is turned upon the objector ; and we are assured that the Bible is divine, that Christ was the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world, and that religion is a system of truth and grace, adapted and designed to make all mankind wise unto salvation.

Scepticism may assume a thousand different shapes ; but, under every form, it has its origin, not in the head, but in the heart. The rejection

* 2 Peter i. 16.

of the Christian religion does not arise from the *want of evidence*, but from a disinclination to the divine character and government, a closing the eyes against the light, and the enmity of the heart towards God. The ancient heathen lost the knowledge of the only true God, because "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Divine wisdom addresses men in accents of tenderness and love; but the voice of mercy is exchanged for the wail of vengeance, because darkness is *preferred* to light, and sin to holiness. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." * Such, also, is the doctrine of Christ and his apostles. "How can ye believe; which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" † "Take

* Proverbs i. 24-31.

† John v. 44.

heed lest there be in any of you *an evil heart of unbelief*, in departing from the living God." * The sufficiency of the Christian Revelation is always assumed; and the unbelief of man is traced to a vicious and depraved nature. This imputation has been spurned, with indignant pride; but the history of the French Revolution, and, indeed, history in all ages, prove that while infidelity subverts the foundation of morals, it is, at once, the offspring and source of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness;—vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality.

From these premises we conclude, reversing the *dictum* of the sceptic, that the church is not a human, but a divine institution.

THE WORLDLING.—“Assuming that the Divine Being is not confined chiefly to his own celestial dominion; that he is not an inactive spectator of the works of men; that he takes knowledge of man, and remembers him for good; that religion is a divine thing, and that the church is a divine institution, what,” say objectors of this class, “is *the use of the one*, and what are *the benefits of the other*? ‘What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?’ † The service of God is a useless, if not an injurious thing. It may be affirmed of religion, that its advantages are all future; that its inheritance is only in

* Hebrews iii. 12.

† Job xxi. 15.

reversion, and that a man must die to enjoy the good which it has to impart; that it neglects the body in the care of the soul, and the life that now is in the care of that which is to come. And it may be asked, What are mankind the better for, the church? Virtue and vice, happiness and misery, good and evil prevailed nearly in the same proportions before the Christian dispensation was introduced, and the Christian church established in the world."

Worldly good is the pursuit of worldly men; and whatever does not contribute to the acquisition and possession of that good, has no charms for them. But "godliness has the promise of the life that now is," as well as "of that which is to come;" and though the concern which we have in it is far less temporal than eternal, yet it does not neglect the body in the care of the soul, and "the things which are seen" in the care of those "which are not seen." This is altogether a false and gratuitous assumption, not less opposed to matter of fact, than to the Word of God.

Great and manifold are the advantages derived from religion of a temporal nature. It limits and directs the wishes of the monarch, the purposes of the minister, the plans of the statesman, the edicts of the senate, the decisions of the magistrate, and the sentence of the judge. It conveys the same principle of equity through the whole detail of social life. The

comforts and conveniences of life ; useful arts and sciences ; salutary laws and good government are the product of religion. " Righteousness exalteth a nation : but sin is a reproach to any people." * National religion and national happiness ; national sin and national misery, are so entwined together, that they cannot be separated. Mankind are not only settled in nations, but distributed into families ; and, if we descend from the larger to the smaller divisions of society, we shall find that religion is not a vain thing. " God setteth the solitary in families ;" and the domestic circle, including the husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, when sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, is one of the most edifying and delightful spectacles which can be presented to our view. The formation and preservation of such circles must be ascribed to the influence of religion ; and a godly family must be a happy family. Religion produces humility, meekness, and benevolence ; and in proportion to the practice of these virtues, must be the happiness of homes. But what a picture of sin and misery do those families exhibit where godliness is not known, and where its principles are not acknowledged ! Pride, malice, and selfishness prevail ; and just in proportion to the prevalence of these vices, is the misery of households. Domestic religion and domestic happiness ;

* Proverbs xiv. 34.


domestic sin and domestic misery, are inseparably connected. Regarding ourselves as individuals, we shall find that "godliness is great gain." The essential requisites of true felicity are well-being, an adequate provision of the necessities and conveniences of life, a fair reputation in the world, a mind stored with useful knowledge, a preparation for death, and the assured hope of immortality; and religion contributes to the acquisition and possession of these elements of human happiness. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." * Individual religion and individual happiness; individual sin and individual misery, must always go hand in hand.

But "is it possible to make the best of *both worlds*?" This is a question which deeply involves our present interests and future prospects. Now Christianity not only replies to this question affirmatively, but insures advantages both temporal and eternal. The happiness which it confers, in the present life, is an earnest and foretaste of that future blessedness which it reveals, and for which its truths and promises are meant to prepare us. Bodily strength, and mental vigour; the flow of feeling, and the rush of energy; "a green old age," and "length of days," though not always connected with religion, are its principal gifts which relate to time. A

* Matthew vi. 33.

medium state of worldly good, as contrasted with the temptations of wealth, and the dangers of poverty; goodness of character, arising from the grace of God, and the practice of virtue; and intelligence, consisting not in scientific and literary culture, but in the stores of sacred knowledge, are fruits of godliness. But "it is appointed unto men once to die;" and, while "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness, the righteous hath hope in his death." Another world presents, to the eye of our faith, the glorified body, the spirit in endless communion with God, the absence of all evil, and the presence of all good. All, indeed, that is good, within the whole range of possible and actual, providential and spiritual, temporal and eternal things, is the sure "inheritance of the saints."

The church also, viewed as a divine institution, has bettered the moral and social condition of mankind. Imperfect and defective as the church confessedly is, yet it is infinitely better than the world. The church may be a barren fig-tree; but the world is a wide waste,—a vast wilderness. The evils which have arisen from the corruptions and divisions of the church, must be confessed and deplored; but the nature and extent of the good which has resulted from the efforts of Christians, will only be fully known at that day which will manifest the works of all men, whether they be good or evil. The good,



however, which already comes under our notice is every way great and extensive, referring to the bodies and souls of men ;—their happiness in this world, and their hopes for that world which is to come. The naked are clothed ; the hungry are fed ; the sick are cured ; the disconsolate are comforted ; the industrious are provided with employment ; the ignorant are instructed ; the wicked are reclaimed ; the idolatrous are Christianized ; the barbarous are civilized ; and men of every colour and of every clime are “turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Individuals, families, communities, and the world at large, have been essentially benefited.

Extensive, however, as is the good which has been already accomplished, yet, compared with what remains to be done, it is as nothing. The temple is only at its foundation ; and far from the completion, when “the head stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it.” The army is only on the frontiers ; and many are the provinces to be occupied before the conquests of grace shall be achieved, and the jubilee of the world shall commence. The light is only glimmering in the tender streaks of morning dawn ; and great must be the increase before it shall penetrate all “the dark places of the earth,” and shine forth in noon-day splendour. The low and languishing state of the church ; the limited diffusion of Christianity in the earth ; and the

extent to which idolatry is permitted to desolate the moral world, are the trials of our faith and hope. But this state of things is not to continue. The sure word of prophecy ; the economy of redemption ; the signs of the times ; and the expectation of Christians, indicate the near approach of the kingdom of God, and the reign of righteousness and peace. And if the church, in the day of her adversity, "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," has effected so much good, what may we not expect in the day of her prosperity, when her "righteousness shall go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth ? "

THE PROFESSOR.—"The church," say those who profess religion, but who have no fellowship with the people of God, "is not what it ought to be. Many of its members do not live up to their profession ; and it is to be feared they have their own religion still to seek ; they are very loose in their principles. There are members who have offended or injured us ; and we cannot join with you, so long as they are tolerated. Beside all this, such a diversity of opinion unhappily prevails concerning the articles of the Christian faith, that we cannot determine which denomination is entitled to our fellowship." While, however, most think themselves too good, some do not think themselves good enough, and say, "We are altogether unfit for the society of Christians ; perhaps

we might become a scandal to the church, and a stumbling-block to the world ; we must wait until we are better ; and then we will unite ourselves to the people of God."

It must be admitted, that the conduct of professing Christians is often at variance with the Christian profession ; but this is no argument against church fellowship. The profession of arms is not condemned, because the hired mercenary fights for gain, the sentinel sleeps at his post, and the coward deserts his ranks. The profession of the law is not condemned, because a suit is lost, and an estate alienated, through the unskilfulness or dishonesty of a solicitor. The profession of medicine is not condemned, because health is injured, and life sacrificed, through the ignorance or carelessness of a physician. And is it fair to condemn the Christian profession, because professors are often inconsistent ? The inconsistency implies the standard ; and if the inconsistency be bad, the standard must be good. If the Word of God give licence and encouragement to offenders, let it be spurned and rejected ; and if the church of Christ tolerate inconsistency and immorality, let her communion be shunned and avoided. But if the inconsistencies of Christians be alike condemned by the Word of God and the church of Christ, let the inference be not against the Bible or the church, but against the faith of the professed believer. There are also a manifest unfairness

and injustice, in regarding a part as the whole, and condemning all for a few.

“It is impossible but that offences will come ;” and offences may be aggravated by positive injury, affecting our person, our family, our reputation, or our worldly interests ; but, still, this affords no good and sufficient ground of objection to the communion of saints. The offence or injury is either imaginary or real. If imaginary,—if it arise from misapprehension, misunderstanding, and groundless suspicion, the objection is not sustained. But if real, forgiveness must be exercised, or forgiveness cannot be obtained. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you : but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” * There are, however, grave offences and injuries which ought not to go unpunished ; and, while the spirit of forgiveness is manifested, the purity of the church and the claims of justice must be vindicated. But whatever may be the nature of the offence, or the punishment of the offender, the divine institution should not be blamed, and the whole body of the faithful shunned. Our duty is plain and clear ; we are “to do justly, love mercy,” and leave the issue with “the Judge of all the earth,” who will “do right.” “Woe unto the world because of offences ! for it must needs be that

* Matthew vi. 14, 15.

offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"*

Diversity of opinion, on religious questions, no doubt exists; and until all minds think alike, and view the deep things of God from the same standpoint, differences of opinion must continue. The points of agreement among Christians, however, are more numerous and important than the points of difference. The agreement is in essentials, and the difference in circumstantialia;—they hold the same head, and build upon the same foundation. But while they "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," they differ on minor and comparatively unimportant points. This is a reason why we ought not to control each other in matters which are purely indifferent. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."† But this is not a reason why we should forego the privilege of Christian fellowship. Surely, among all the churches of our land, there is one where we shall find a resting-place for the understanding, as well as the heart.

The foregoing objections are mere pretexts; and the unwillingness of men to enter the church does not arise from any of these sources, but often from the love and practice of sin. "And this is the condem-

* Matthew xviii. 7.

† Romans xiv. 17.

nation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." * The aversion of men to God and the people of God, is to be traced to evil passions and habits,—to bad deeds, springing from bad principles.

There is, however, a most important exception to this remark. A reason is alleged, by many, which demands our most careful consideration. A sense of unfitness and unworthiness prevents thousands from entering the church of God. "The church is holy, and we are unholy. The church has a mighty mission to the world, and we should impair its efficiency, and lessen its usefulness. While the table of the Lord should not be surrounded with superstitious terrors, it should be fenced and guarded against all unworthy communicants. After a while, we may obtain pardon and peace; and, then, we will confess Christ before men." This reason is insufficient and inadmissible. All the fitness required, we have shown, is either faith in Christ, or repentance on account of past sin. Have you then believed on the Son of God? Have you sat at the feet of Jesus and heard his word? Have you trusted in the merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection? Have you looked to Christ, come to Christ, and fled to Christ for refuge? If so, "the Spirit and the bride


* John iii. 19.

say, Come." While the Spirit invites, and the church joins in the invitation, hearken to the voice, and obey the call. But assuming that you have not believed, are you convinced of sin? Are you sorrowing on account of sin? Are you confessing and forsaking your sin? If so, "COME, AND WELCOME." Come to Christ, and he "will in no wise cast you out." Come to the church; and the people of God will do you good. The church is a school; and you will be taught. The church is an hospital; and you will be healed. The church is a family; and you will be loved and kindly treated. The church is a communion; and the symbols of the atoning blood will excite, assist, and crown your faith.

From the principles which have been laid down and established, in the foregoing chapters, a solemn and pointed application is suggested to all. Mankind are divided into two societies,—the church and the world,—the servants of God and the servants of Satan,—the children of God and the heirs of immortality,—and the children of wrath and the heirs of perdition. Both these societies are claiming your fellowship; saying, "Come thou with us;" and urging their respective advantages. The one presents the abiding pleasures of religion, and the everlasting enjoyments of heaven; and the other the transitory things, and the sliding vanities of time and sense. You are called upon now to choose: Shall it

be for the church or the world? Shall it be for salvation or perdition? Shall it be for heaven or hell?

YOUTH, the church claims the first fruits of your life. God says, "My son, give me thine heart;" and the church says, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth;" join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant; and then walk "not in the counsel of the ungodly," nor stand "in the way of sinners," nor "sit in the seat of the scornful;" but "walk with wise men," and unite yourselves to those who "fear the Lord," and speak "often one to another." You will never have so fair an opportunity. You will never present so acceptable a sacrifice. You will never find so little difficulty. At an early period of life, your mind is distinguished by flexibility, tenderness, and susceptibility of religious impression. In the days of your youth, evil habits have not been acquired; injurious connexions have not been formed; and the heart has not been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. While godliness is profitable to all, it is especially so to you; and while church membership is of vital importance to all, it is of pre-eminent importance to you, who are now rising into life. But it may be you have already formed connexions which hold you to the world, and keep you back from the church. Change your place of abode,




sacrifice your worldly interests, and relinquish the tenderest endearments of life, that you may escape the contagion of bad company, and go into society which will, by their counsel and example, point out the way in which you should walk. To yield yourselves unto God, is to insure your dearest interests and truest happiness. To delay, is to place your character and salvation in the utmost jeopardy. Your duty is to devote the morning of your days to God and his church.

PERSONS MATURE IN AGE, the church demands the choicest efforts of your life. You cannot in the days of your youth render the most acceptable offering to God and the church, because the bloom of youth has passed away, and you have reached the palmy state of man. But you may now give your whole heart to the Lord, and your society and services to his people. Yesterday has gone back into the ages beyond the Flood. To-morrow is in the bosom of futurity. But to-day is yours. You may now bid farewell to the world, with all its allurements and attractions. You may now enter the church by the door of repentance, faith, and regeneration. You may now find, in the church, the widest scope for your ripest faculties, your amplest possessions, and all the energies of your body and mind. You may still obtain the glorious recompense by which all the engagements and privations connected with the service of God, will be consum-

mated in heaven. To listen to suggestions of delay, is to listen to the most malignant deception of the world and hell. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Your duty is, at once, to consecrate the flower of your age, and the prime of your life, to the service of Christ and his cause.

AGED PEOPLE, the church accepts the small remnant of your life. You have lived almost "three-score years and ten," "without God and without hope in the world." You have delayed until the eleventh hour; and the last hour only remains. Your hearts are hardened through prolonged inattention to religion. You now find hindrances, arising from various sources. There is the force of habit. There is the obduracy of heart. There is the pain of body. There is the anguish of mind. There is the decay of memory. There is the childhood of age. You are now approaching the confines of the eternal world. The evil days have come upon you, and the years in which you have no pleasure. Your case, though not hopeful, is not without hope. It is perhaps never too late, until death closes our eyes in darkness. You may still find in the church a hiding-place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest. You have one instance of a sinner saved at the close of life. But then, it was under circumstances which can never again be repeated. The heavens were




darkened ; the earth was trembling ; the rocks were rending ; the graves were opening ; and the Lord of life and glory was expiring. Your case is not yet so critical ; but still it should excite terror and alarm. Your day is far spent. The night is at hand. The eleventh hour is passing away. The dispensation of grace is about to cease. The curtain is already falling. The voice of the Judge is about to pronounce the sentence, "Cut him down." The law utters its thunders against you. The sword of vengeance flames over your head. Hell from beneath is moved to meet you at your coming. The unquenchable flame already flashes upon you. "Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation."* If you feel any unwillingness to come to Christ, drag your hearts to him ; offer a moral violence to your feelings ; and, without the slightest hesitation and the least delay, flee "for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you." Your duty is to take refuge in Christ and his church, and dedicate the residue of your days to his service.

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God." Whether there may be upon you the bloom and splendours of the morning ; or whether you may be enshrined in the brightness of noon-day ; or whether you may be obscured amidst the shadows of the

* 2 Corinthians vi. 2.

evening, consecrate yourselves to God and the service of his church, and hasten on that result which will stamp the seal of eternal truth upon every part of the sacred volume ; which will diffuse knowledge, holiness, and happiness through the wide world ; and which will fulfil "the mystery of God" in the universal triumph of the church, and the utter failure of her enemies.

The beautiful and comprehensive prayer-ode of Milton may now appropriately conclude the argument of this volume. "Come, therefore, O thou that hast the seven stars in thy right hand, appoint thy chosen priests, according to their orders and courses of old, to minister before thee, and duly to press and pour out the consecrated oil into thy holy and ever-burning lamps. Thou hast sent out the spirit of prayer upon thy servants over all the land to this effect, and stirred up their vows as the sound of many waters about thy throne. Every one can say, that now certainly thou hast visited this land, and hast not forgotten the utmost corners of the earth, in a time when men had thought that thou wast gone up from us to the farthest end of the heavens, and hadst left to do marvellously among the sons of these last ages. O perfect and accomplish thy glorious acts ! for men may leave their works unfinished, but thou art a God, thy nature is perfection : shouldst thou bring us far on from Egypt to destroy us in this wilderness,



though we deserve ; yet thy great name would suffer in the rejoicing of thine enemies, and the deluded hope of all thy servants. When thou hast settled peace in the church, and righteous judgment in the kingdom, then shall thy saints address their voices of joy and triumph to thee, standing on the shore of that Red Sea into which our enemies had almost driven us. And he that now for haste snatches up a plain ungarnished present as a thank-offering to thee, which could not be deferred, in regard of thy so many late deliverances wrought for us one upon another, may then perhaps take up a harp, and sing thee an elaborate song to generations. In that day it shall no more be said as in scorn, 'This or that was never held so till this present age,' when men have better learnt that the times and seasons pass along under thy feet, to go and come at thy bidding ; and as thou didst dignify our fathers' days with many revelations above all the foregoing ages, since thou tookest the flesh ; so thou canst vouchsafe to us (though unworthy) as large a portion of thy Spirit as thou pleasest : for who shall prejudice thy all-governing will ? seeing the power of thy grace is not passed away with the primitive times, as fond and faithless men imagine, but thy kingdom is now at hand, and thou standing at the door. COME FORTH OUT OF THY ROYAL CHAMBERS, O PRINCE OF ALL THE KINGS OF THE EARTH ! PUT ON THE VISIBLE ROBES

OF THY IMPERIAL MAJESTY, TAKE UP THAT UNLIMITED SCEPTRE WHICH THY ALMIGHTY FATHER HATH BEQUEATHED THEE ; FOR NOW THE VOICE OF THY BRIDE CALLS THEE, AND ALL CREATURES SIGH TO BE RENEWED."

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH.

THE ARGUMENT RESUMED. BAPTISM: WHAT IT IS.
THE LORD'S SUPPER: WHAT IT REPRESENTS.

THE Church of Rome has seven Sacraments ;—Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction. But the Church of Christ has only two ;—Baptism and the Lord's Supper ; and, as these are of vital importance to the church, and are often referred to in the foregoing pages, a brief notice of each may be necessary. Nor can it be deemed improper or uninteresting to resume these questions, which have been already, but imperfectly, considered. "Because some things," says Howe, "not fit to be wholly omitted, were as little fit to come into the body of a practical discourse, 't was thought requisite to subjoin here the following additions, that will severally have reference to distinct parts of the foregoing discourse." This remark may apply to the attempt now made to supplement two points, which, however important, could not have been treated in the body of the work, without interrupting the argument.

I. BAPTISM : WHAT IT IS.

"From an erroneous interpretation of the figurative language of a few passages in Scripture, in which the sign is identified with the thing signified, very similar to the mistake which afterwards led to transubstantiation, it was universally supposed that baptism was invariably accompanied with a supernatural effect, which totally changed the state and character of the candidate, and constituted him a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven."—ROBERT HALL.

"Perhaps some may say, 'But what needs all this? Were we not once devoted and given up to God in baptism? and is not that sufficient? To what purpose should we do again a thing that hath once been so solemnly done?' Let us reason this matter therefore awhile, and consider whether, notwithstanding any such allegation, our personal dedicating ourselves to God in Christ be not still reasonable and necessary to be performed by ourselves also, as our own solemn act and deed. It were indeed much to be wished that our baptismal dedication to God were more minded and thought on than it commonly is; when with such sacred solemnity we were devoted to the Triune Deity, and those great and awful names were named upon us, the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Ghost. Baptisms are, it is to be feared, too often in the Christian world turned into a mere pageantry, and the matter scarce ever thought on more, when the show is over; and very probably because this great succedaneous duty is so unpractised among Christians."—HOWE on Self-dedication.

The nature of baptism; the candidates for the ordinance; and the mode of its administration cannot be largely considered; and, for fuller information on these points, the reader is referred to Watson's "Theological Institutes;" Halley's "Inquiry into

the Nature of the Symbolic Institutions of the Christian Religion ;" and "Facts and Evidences on the Subject of Baptism."

Baptism is not regeneration. Nor is baptismal dedication, self-dedication to God. Regeneration is not a change of relation, but a change of heart and life. This is the sense in which the term is employed in the Sacred Writings, and in which it is taken by men in general. It is only another word for the New Birth, Conversion, and Holiness. To use it in any other sense ; to apply it to initial salvation ; to employ it to designate a new and more advantageous position for securing salvation ; to use it for "the free gift which has come upon all men unto justification of life," is in a high degree misleading and dangerous. It must be confined, exclusively, to a deliverance from the bondage of sin, and the power and will to do all things that are pleasing to God, which are wrought by the Holy Spirit ; and, in this sense, it is not the concomitant or consequent of baptism. This, indeed, is an error which is sanctioned by great authorities ; and there are Masters of Arts and Doctors of Divinity who take this view of the religion of the Bible. But the theory has no foundation, either in reason or Scripture. It is contrary to matter of fact. Children, whether baptized or unbaptized, go astray from the first dawn of reason, discovering tempers and habits which are the offspring of a vicious

and corrupt nature. It is in direct opposition to the teaching of Scripture. Repentance, faith, and regeneration are enjoined upon all men, whether baptized in the name of Christ or not. But if men are regenerated in baptism, why should they repent, believe, and be born again? Passages of Scripture are adduced by Tractarians and others, to prove that baptism and regeneration are always connected; but it is only by a forced and fanciful interpretation, that they are made to support this view.

What then is baptism? It is the rite of initiation into the church and covenant of God. Circumcision stood in the same relation to the Jewish church, that baptism holds to the Christian church. Circumcision was the form of initiation into the old covenant; and baptism is the form of initiation into the new covenant. The children of Jewish parents were circumcised the eighth day, and received into a state of special covenant relation with God. The conditions of the covenant were to be observed; and all the blessings of the covenant were to be enjoyed. The old covenant had two parts:—"I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." The people were to take Jehovah as the sole object of their religious worship, put their whole trust in him, and serve him in his own appointed way. This was their part. God was to accept them as his people, give them his Spirit to guide them, his mercy to pardon them, his

providence to protect them, and his grace to preserve them to eternal life. This was his part. The children of Christian parents are to be baptized in the name of Christ, and introduced into a state of special covenant relation with God. The conditions of the covenant,—repentance, faith, and holiness, are to be observed; and all the blessings of the covenant,—pardon, sanctification, and eternal life, are to be enjoyed. The new covenant is the method of salvation, which God has devised and appointed, according to which all who repent and believe in Christ are saved here; and all who continue faithful unto death will be saved hereafter. But, in the case of both covenants, to neglect the conditions was to forfeit the blessings. The Jew, though circumcised, might be cut off; and the Christian, though baptized, may be lost. But let no one conclude, from the foregoing remarks, that unbaptized children are left to the uncovenanted mercies of God. The scriptural doctrine is that all men, baptized or unbaptized, are in a salvable state; and that while the Gospel presents the assurance of salvation only to believers, it presents the overtures of salvation to all. Nevertheless, God's way of saving men is the surest, readiest, and wisest method of salvation.

Baptism is also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. It is a sign or symbol of regeneration, and the washing away of sin by the Holy Ghost,

teaching and setting forth, in a visible manner, the same truth which at other times is taught and set forth by the preaching of the Word. It is a seal;—a pledge, guarantee, and assurance that upon our faith, preceded by true repentance, and followed by holy obedience, all the blessings of grace will be enjoyed by us in this world, and all the blessings of glory in that world which is to come. The practice, in all ages and countries, has been to seal, as well as to sign, covenants or agreements; and the seal has always been regarded as a pledge that the covenant would be fulfilled. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel,” has not only symbolized, but sealed the blessings of the New Covenant, that by signs and seals, as well as promises and oaths, he might invigorate our confidence, and assure our hope.

The candidates for the ordinance of baptism are adults and infants. Adults, who had not been baptized in infancy, were baptized by the apostles and their successors; and adults now, who have never been baptized, should be admitted into the church by the ordinance of baptism. On this question, there is no difference of opinion between the advocates and opponents of infant baptism. But whether children should be baptized has been matter of controversy, and even angry disputation:—some affirming that infant baptism was ordained by Christ, and practised

by the apostles ; and others alleging it to be a modern invention, without the warrant of Scripture or sanction of antiquity. The affirmative of this question we believe ; and there are not wanting sufficient reasons to justify our faith.

Baptism was substituted by Christ and his apostles for circumcision, as the initiatory rite of the Christian church ; and, as the children of Jewish parents were dedicated to God on the eighth day by circumcision, so the children of Christian parents should be dedicated to God in infancy by baptism. Of the substitution of the Christian for the Jewish rite, we have ample proof. God made a covenant with Abraham, including the promise of both temporal and spiritual blessings. The Mosaic economy was a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant, with a restriction of its privileges to the Jewish nation. Of this covenant, circumcision was the initiatory rite. But when Jesus Christ came, circumcision was abolished, and baptism was introduced. Now if the one did not take the place of the other, it follows that the New Covenant, unlike the Old, has no initiatory rite at all. 'No one will contend that the Lord's Supper is the rite of initiation. But there are several passages of Scripture which teach, expressly or by undeniable inference, not only that baptism stands in the same relation to the New Covenant that circumcision did to the Old, but that it took its place by divine appointment. "And ye

are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." * Here baptism is made the initiatory rite of the evangelical economy; and it is called "the circumcision of Christ," implying that it takes the place and fulfils the office of circumcision, introducing men into God's covenant, and securing to them the enjoyment of its privileges. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." † Here the same office is ascribed to baptism as to circumcision,—admission into the church and covenant of God; and the conclusion therefore is inevitable, that the one was put in the place of the other, and insured even superior privileges.‡ So long as the sacrament of circumcision continued to be in force, the infant offspring of Jewish parents continued to be circumcised; and so long as

* Colossians ii. 10-12.

† Galatians iii. 27-29.

‡ See also Mark xvi. 15, 16, and 1 Peter iii. 20, 21.

the sacrament of baptism continues to be in force, and to occupy the place of that now obsolete rite, the infant offspring of Christian parents should be baptized. The sign and seal of the covenant were changed, in the substitution of baptism for circumcision; but not the least intimation is given that the subjects were changed, by the substitution of adults for children. To carry the change farther than the Great Lawgiver Himself, is an act of unwarrantable presumption,—an impertinent interference with the authority of Christ.

The grand commission proceeds upon the principle of infant baptism. The apostles were to go and teach, that is, *disciple*, all the nations, baptizing *them* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Who are the subjects of baptism? is here a question of grammar and criticism. The antecedent to the word *αὐτοὺς*, “them,” is, *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*, “all nations;” so that the terms of the commission are, *Baptize all the nations*. And surely our opponents will admit that infants must be comprehended in nations, if they should not always be included in households. But, further, the terms of the commission are “baptizing and teaching.” Baptism is to be followed by instruction. By baptism we are *entered*, and by instruction we are *discipled* in the school of Christ. Baptism initiates and commences,

* Matthew xxviii. 19, 20.

and divine instruction perfects and completes the work.

"Young children," and "little children," are declared to be subjects of the kingdom of heaven. "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them : and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus, saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God." * Our Lord here speaks of infants ; and he declares that they form a part of his kingdom. "The kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven," sometimes denotes the kingdom of glory, or the everlasting enjoyments of the heavenly world. Of this use of the phrase we have many instances in the Sacred Writings. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." † "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." ‡ Now children belong to this kingdom, because, if they die before actual sin is committed, they are admitted into heaven through the death of Christ ; and because it is only by actual sin that this right to the inheritance of eternal life is forfeited. But on what ground, or by

* Mark x. 13, 14.

† Matthew vii. 21.

‡ Luke xiii. 29.

what authority, are we to exclude those from the church upon earth who are fit for "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven," and to refuse the ordinance of baptism, which is the mode of admission into the church? But "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven," at other times, denotes the kingdom of grace, or the blessings of Gospel salvation. Of this use of the phrase we have the strongest examples in the Sacred Writings. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel."* "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."† Now children are the subjects of this kingdom, because all the blessings of grace have been purchased for them by Christ; and because their right to these can only be forfeited by actual sin. But the right of membership must include the right of baptism,—the mode of introduction into the church; and if infants are a part of the spiritual church, they ought to be admitted into the visible church.

The baptism of whole houses or families is a branch of the argument which ought to be briefly noticed. "The house of the jailor;" ‡ "the household of Lydia;" § and "the household of

* Mark i. 15.

† Matthew xi. 12.

‡ Acts xvi. 33.

§ Acts xvi. 14, 15.

Stephanas," * were baptized by the apostles. The Greek words *oikos* and *oikia*, which our translators have rendered indifferently *house* or *household*, have distinct meanings. *Oikia* includes all the inhabitants of a house; but *oikos* ALWAYS denotes kindred in the nearest possible degree, and therefore emphatically *children*, while it uniformly and necessarily excludes *servants*. The inevitable conclusion is, that the apostles, who so frequently baptized the collection of persons called an *oikos*, but never an *oikia*, must have baptized infants. But, independently of criticism, we have reason to believe that in one or more of the three houses in question, there must have been young children. The absence of children in a family is the exception; and an exception of such comparatively rare occurrence, that we could hardly visit three families promiscuously without finding children. But assuming that in the house of the jailor, Lydia, and Stephanas, all were adults, what right have we to assume further that all were believers, and, therefore, as believing adults, proper candidates for the ordinance? The force of this argument can only be evaded by two perfectly gratuitous assumptions,—that there were no children; and that if there were adults, beside the heads of the families, they were believers, of which there is not the least intimation.

* 1 Corinthians i. 16.

¹ See Facts and Evidences.

From the practice of the primitive church, "a great cloud of witnesses" might be adduced ; but the argument, which is very conclusive, must be compressed within the narrowest limits. From the age of the apostles, Christian writers affirm infant baptism to have been the universal practice of the church. Cyprian informs us that a council of sixty-six bishops, at Carthage, held about a hundred and fifty years after the apostles, "decided unanimously that no infant is to be prohibited from baptism, although but just born." Origen, who was born about the year 184, says, "Infants are baptized for the remission of sins." "The church had also from the apostles an order to give baptism to infants ; for they, to whom divine mysteries were committed, knew that there was in all persons a natural pollution, which ought to be washed away by water and the Spirit." Justin Martyr, who lived about forty years after the apostles, says, "Several persons among us, both men and women, of sixty or seventy years old, who were *discipled* (or made disciples) to Christ in or from their infancy, do continue uncorrupt." But the only mode of making disciples, from infancy, was by baptism.

The conclusions of an eminent writer rest on grounds which the opponents of infant baptism have not been able to invalidate. "First, during the *first four hundred years* from the formation of the Christian church, Tertullian alone urged the delay of baptism to

infants, and that only in some cases; and Gregory only delayed it, perhaps, to his own children. But neither any society of men, nor any individual, denied the lawfulness of baptizing infants.

“Secondly, in the *next seven hundred years*, there was not a society nor an individual who even pleaded for this delay; much less any one who denied the right, or the duty, of infant baptism.

“Thirdly, in the year 1120, one sect of the Waldenses declared against the baptism of infants; because they supposed them incapable of salvation. But the main body of that people rejected the opinion as heretical; and the sect which held it soon came to nothing.

“Fourthly, the next appearance of this opinion was in the year 1522.”

Upwards of a thousand years passed away before a Baptist church was founded. The denomination arose in Germany in the fifteenth century. But in England the first Baptist church was founded between 1638 and 1640.¹ The practice of infant baptism is of *primitive and even apostolic* origin. The denial of this sacrament to infants is a *modern innovation*, by a body of Christians who in other respects have rendered the most important services to the church of Christ at home and abroad, and who enrol among their ministers the names of FULLER, HALL, CAREY,

¹ Turner on the Divine Validity of Infant Baptism.

and MARSHMAN,—“messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.”

Baptism, *as to the mode of its administration*, may be by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. The bearing of *βάπτω* on the question at issue; the primary and proper meaning of *βαπτίζω*, as it is found in the classical writers; and the various uses of these terms in the New Testament, are points which cannot be considered within the limits of this work. Let it suffice to say here, that in the Sacred Writings and the classics, *βαπτίζω* is used to signify dipping the hand into a dish,* staining the vesture with blood,† wetting the body with dew,‡ smearing the face with colours, overwhelming a ship in water, pouring water upon the hands, and sprinkling. No inference in favour of immersion can be deduced from the strongest word employed in Scripture to denote Christian baptism.

As the question cannot be settled by grammar and criticism, let us proceed from words to things.

The baptism of John was probably administered to two millions of people.¹ “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” § His ministry continued only about six months.² If therefore he had baptized

* Matthew xxvi. 23. † Revelation xix. 13. ‡ Daniel iv. 33.

¹ Thorn.

§ Matthew iii. 5, 6.

² Dr. Halley.

from morning until night, the immersion of such a multitude would have been impossible. Whether they were baptized in their clothes; or whether they had provided a change of raiment; or whether they had undressed and dressed on the banks of the river, men and women, so contrary to the habits of oriental countries, the baptism of such vast crowds by immersion is a thing altogether incredible.

But the testimony of John himself is against the notion. "I baptize you with water: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." * Here two baptisms are spoken of,—the mode of administration is the same; the first is with water, and the second with the Holy Ghost. The manner in which John baptized with water is not expressed in Scripture; but the manner in which Christ baptized with the Holy Ghost was by effusion, shedding, or pouring. The conclusion, therefore, which may be fairly deduced is, that John baptized with water by effusion, shedding, or pouring. Without this principle of interpretation, there would be no analogy between the two things compared.

From the baptism of John, let us turn our attention to the baptisms which took place on the day of Pentecost. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." †

* Matthew iii. 11.

† Acts ii. 41.

The fact here recorded is that three thousand persons were baptized during part of one day in Jerusalem ; and the inquiry arises, How could this be done by immersion ? If there was much water at Ænon, there was but very little water at Jerusalem, not a sufficient quantity for such an occasion. The apostles were only twelve in number ; and, whatever might have been the distribution of labour, the work could not have been accomplished in so short a time. The change of raiment required would have involved the most extraordinary preparation and difficulty, if not an utter impossibility ; and the immersion of females in a place of public resort, without any preparation, and in the presence of vast multitudes, would have been such an outrage upon all decency that it would not have been attempted.

But leaving Jerusalem, and proceeding to Samaria, we shall find our position strengthened. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." * From the whole tenor of the narrative, it would

* Acts viii. 5-12.

appear that the people generally were baptized by Philip. The metropolis of Samaria was Sychem; and, in all probability, this was the place where Philip preached and baptized. But the only collection of pure water at Sychem was Jacob's well: the well was deep; and the water was obtained with difficulty. Were Simon Magus and the people of the city immersed in the well? or was there some one present greater than Jacob, who could tell of any other water? or shall we assume that there was abundance of water at Sychem, believing modern travellers rather than ancient writers, and concluding that what may be now, was in the days of the apostles? or shall we deny that Sychem was the place in question, contrary to all antiquity, which has considered it as the residence of Simon Magus? While water in some places is too scarce, in others it is too cold for immersion. Who would plead for dipping in Greenland? It would cool the zeal of the most fiery advocate of immersion, to plunge him in either of the frigid zones.

The practice of antiquity establishes four points; and Dr. Halley has furnished an able summary of the evidence on each point.

"1. Ecclesiastical writers admit Christian baptisms to have been valid in which there was no immersion.

"2. They speak of other ablutions, as baptisms, in which there was no immersion.

"3. They apply to Christian baptism passages of Scripture which obviously exclude immersion.

"4. They speak of the lustrations of the heathens, in which there was no immersion, as their baptisms, or imitations of baptisms."

From the remarks which have been already made, it may be safely affirmed that baptism is an initiatory, but not a saving, ordinance; that it is not an end, but a means to an end; and that it ought to be administered to infants, by sprinkling or pouring.

II. THE LORD'S SUPPER : WHAT IT REPRESENTS.

“‘NEITHER by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.’ Alas ! those legal sacrifices were but dumb shows of this tragedy, the mere figures of this oblation, mystically presenting to their faith that ‘Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’ This Lamb was prefigured in the sacrifices of the law, and is now presented in the sacraments of the Gospel, slain indeed from the beginning of the world.”—THOMAS ADAMS, Preacher at Paul’s Cross, 1612.

“A sacrament taken in its full extent comprehendeth two things in it ; that which is outward and visible, and that which is inward and invisible. Thus, in the Lord’s Supper, the outward thing which we see with our eyes is *the bread and wine*, the inward thing which we apprehend by faith is *the body and blood of Christ* : in the outward part of this mystical action, we receive this body and blood but sacramentally ; in the inward, we receive them really : and consequently the presence of these in the one is *relative and symbolical*, in the other *real and substantial*.”—ARCHBISHOP USHER.

THE Supper of the Lord is a standing memorial, a perpetual memento of his sacrificial death, as an atonement for the sins of men. The bread represents the body, and the wine the blood of Christ, as offered in sacrifice. This holy sacrament is placed before us under several most instructive aspects ; and these have been noticed in the preceding parts of this volume. But the point now before us is *the representative character* of the ordinance ; and this view merits special attention, at the present time, as the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ have been either

boldly denied, or explained away by sophisticated interpretations of the Word of God.

As baptism was substituted for circumcision, so the Lord's Supper was substituted for the Passover. The Passover, the most eminent of the Jewish festivals, was instituted the night before the Israelites left Egypt, as a perpetual memorial of their signal deliverance from the destroying angel ; and it was a type of the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us ; therefore let us keep the feast." * The circumstances and the design of this most ancient and impressive ceremony are minutely described in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Exodus.¹ The paschal lamb was to be a male without blemish of the first year ; it was to be offered for the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel ; it was to be killed in the evening ; its blood was to be sprinkled upon the lintel and the door-posts of the houses occupied by the Israelites, that the destroying angel might pass over the houses thus marked ; and the ordinance of the Passover was to commemorate this most important event. Now the paschal lamb was an eminent and illustrious type of the Lamb of God ; and, between the type and the antitype, the resemblance is in many particulars exact and striking. The paschal lamb was to be perfect, a male of the first year, without spot or blemish ; and Jesus Christ pos-

* 1 Corinthians v. 7.

¹ Robert Hall.

essed every natural and moral perfection, and was sacrificed "in the flower of his strength," and the maturity and manhood of his nature. The paschal sacrifice was offered not for an individual, but for the whole congregation of the people; and Jesus Christ was offered not for a part of the world, but for the whole world. The paschal lamb was sacrificed on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan, in the evening; and Jesus Christ expired on the cross "about the ninth hour," at the feast of the Passover. The paschal sacrifice would have been of no avail to the Israelites unless its blood had been sprinkled on the posts of their doors, as a consecrated token to be observed by the destroying angel; and the blood of Christ will be of no avail to us unless it be applied to our hearts. The paschal lamb was designed, in the first instance, to prevent the destruction of the first-born of the Israelites, and the Passover was instituted afterwards to commemorate their deliverance; and Jesus Christ was sacrificed to accomplish our deliverance from the wrath of God, the curse of the law, the malice of the devil, and the vengeance of eternal fire; and the Lord's Supper was instituted to commemorate the sacrifice of the cross as the means of our deliverance.

The redemption of man, which is signified and represented by this blessed sacrament, was accomplished not by the teaching and example, but by the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The matter and manner of his teaching were, indeed, adapted to make all men wise unto salvation; and the purity of his life contributed to the efficacy of his death. He was "a prophet, mighty in word and in deed;" he was "the one example of all examples;" but more than all, and above all, and as the sum of all, he was a sacrifice for sin. Without the suffering of death, there could have been no remission of sins; and without the resurrection from the dead, there could have been no hope of salvation. As the sufferings of Christ were necessary to satisfy the claims of divine justice, and make an atonement for human transgression, so his resurrection was necessary to prove the divinity of his person, and the perfection of his atonement.

Various and impressive are the aspects under which the death of Christ is presented in the Word of God; but they all coincide in this one point, that it was "for us men and for our salvation." Turning our attention from THE SIGN to THE THING SIGNIFIED, we may well linger on the scenes of Calvary. The false lights which are now issuing from the stagnant marshes of human learning, render this digression, if such it may be called, the more necessary.

The death of Christ was *a substitution of the innocent for the guilty*. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be

made the righteousness of God in him." * "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." † The substitution of the innocent for the guilty, in every case, involves several important conditions ; and these conditions were unequivocally satisfied in the mystery of Christ's substitution. It is obvious that to give such a procedure validity and effect, it must be sanctioned by the supreme authority ; and Jesus Christ "was sent to be the propitiation for our sins." Another condition is, that the undertaking be perfectly voluntary on the part of the sufferer ; and Jesus Christ "was led as a lamb to the slaughter," and evinced a readiness to be offered up. It is farther requisite that the substitute be altogether free from the offence which renders punishment necessary ; and Jesus Christ was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." There would be a propriety in this also, that the Redeemer should stand in the same relation to the persons whom he came to redeem ; and Jesus Christ "took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." Another indispensable circumstance is, that the undertaking should not be the result of momentary enthusiasm and sudden impulse, but cool deliberation and settled purpose ; and Jesus Christ "was the

* 2 Corinthians v. 21.

† 1 Peter iii. 18.

lamb slain from the foundation of the world." It is farther necessary that the party suffering should justify the law by which he suffers ; and Jesus Christ " magnified the law " and " made it honourable." There would be a great propriety in this, that the substitute should be at least of equal consideration with the party on whose behalf he interposes ; and Jesus Christ was not only man, but " God over all." Another indispensable condition is, that the privation and suffering endured should issue in a glorious reward ; and Jesus Christ, " when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." It is farther necessary that the substitution of one for another should be introduced sparingly, only on rare occasions, and that it should never be allowed to subside into a settled course ; and Jesus Christ " once suffered from the beginning of the world." There would be a fitness and propriety in this, that there should be a publication of the whole transaction, as to its nature and design ; and " thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." * Such are the great principles involved in the substitution of one for another ; and such was the manner in which these principles were illustrated and

* Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

exhibited in the appearance and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

Redemption is connected with the death of Christ. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." * "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." † Redemption denotes primarily the liberation of captives, and secondarily deliverance from exile, death, or any other evil, by paying a ransom, or rendering an equivalent. The subjects of redemption, in the case before us, were not angels, but men; not men merely, but sinners; and not sinners merely, but sinners of the worst kind, and in the most degraded condition;—the servants of sin, the slaves of corruption, and the captives of Satan. The price of our redemption was the everlasting Son of the Father, who laid aside his glory, took upon himself our nature, and poured out his soul as an offering for sin. The redemption of man, including his deliverance from the guilt, the pollution, and the consequences of sin, is not a gratuitous deliverance, granted as a mere act of pre-

¹ See Hall on Substitution.

* Galatians iii. 13.

† 1 Peter i. 18, 19.

rogative. The ransom has been paid; one thing has been given for another; the precious blood of Christ for the captive and condemned souls of men. "The Son of Man came to give his life λύτρον, a ransom for many." * "Who gave himself ἀντίλυτρον, a ransom for all."

The death of Christ was a *propitiatory offering or sacrifice to God*. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." † "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." ‡ To propitiate is "to appease, to atone, to turn away the wrath of an offended person." The wrath appeased or turned away, in the case before us, is the wrath of God. "God is angry with the wicked every day;" and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." The displeasure of God here implies disapprobation of our conduct; and, if not averted, it will hereafter ripen into vengeance that admits not of pity. The person making the propitiation is Jesus Christ. Viewed in himself and in his work, he was in the highest degree the object of divine complacency and delight; and, therefore, he was pre-eminently qualified to appease the wrath of God. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth,"—a prophetic testimony which was con-

* Matthew xx. 28. † Romans iii. 25. ‡ 1 John iv. 10.

firmed by a voice from the excellent glory, when, amidst the splendours of the holy mount, it was proclaimed in the ears of earth and heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The propitiatory offering was his blood. The sacrifice was the suffering of death, the shedding of his blood, the pouring out his soul. But placability does not imply actual reconciliation; and while God is now placable, he is not reconciled to sinners until they repent and believe in Christ.

Reconciliation is connected with the death of Christ. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."* "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."† Reconciliation supposes enmity; and a state of hostility actually exists between God and man. While in a state of nature, we are the objects of the divine displeasure. God is infinitely holy and just. Sin is the abominable thing which he hates and punishes. It is not in the nature of holiness to behold sin with impunity. It is not in the nature of justice to remit, in any mode or in any measure, the punishment. The claims of holiness and justice are not affected by distance or by time;

* Romans v. 10.

† 2 Corinthians v. 19.

for, until those claims are satisfied, distance of place and lapse of time afford no ground of security. While in our natural and unrenewed state, we are also at enmity with God. Why is it that we have transgressed his laws, spurned his authority, insulted his majesty, abused his goodness, neglected his salvation, and done despite to his Spirit? The answer to these and similar inquiries is obvious; it is because there are aversion, dislike, and hatred to God; it is because there is implacable and malignant opposition to his laws, his government, and his rule. Sin, under all varieties of aspect and combinations of thought, is enmity against God. But when repentance and faith take place, the displeasure of God subsides, and the enmity of man ceases. The reconciliation of God to man, and of man to God, is through our Lord Jesus Christ. By his atonement he has satisfied the justice of God; and by his Spirit he slays the enmity of man. But then his atonement was his obedience unto death, and his Spirit is the fruit of his mediation. The most plausible objection to this view, which can hardly be passed over, is that, while man is the enemy of God, God cannot be the enemy of man; and that, therefore, there is no need of reconciliation on his part. The enmity, hostility, and hatred on the part of God do not imply irascible and malignant passions, as in man, which would not be consistent with the absolute perfection of the divine nature, but

such a disapproval of sin as will lead him to punish the sinner. Of enmity in this sense, and consequent need of reconciliation, we have the plainest and most positive intimations in the word of God. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."* "For our God is a consuming fire."† Though wrath in God is not the same as wrath in man, yet "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The ground and reason of justification, adoption, regeneration, entire sanctification, and all the blessings of the great salvation, are the death of Christ. Let us adduce the teaching of Scripture on each of these points. Justification:—"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."‡ Adoption:—"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."§ Regeneration:—"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"|| Entire sanctification:—"Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanc-

* Romans i. 18. † Hebrews xii. 29. ‡ Romans iii. 24.

§ Galatians iv. 4, 5.

|| Hebrews ix. 14.

tify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." * All the blessings of grace and glory :— " He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? " † But how could man be justified, adopted, regenerated, and sanctified through Jesus Christ, unless his death were a good and sufficient reason for the whole procedure? Justification is not an act of prerogative done above law, but a judicial process which takes place according to law. Adoption is not incorporation into the family of God, as a mere act of caprice, but proceeds upon a wise and righteous principle. Regeneration and sanctification are not a process of self-purification, but through "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The pardon of sin, indeed, is the special act of God the Father. Adoption into the family of God is a simple volition of the Deity. The purification of the heart is the special and peculiar work of God the Holy Ghost. But still the death of Christ is the grand consideration which vindicates the whole procedure, and renders it a most impressive spectacle in the eyes of men and angels. Had men been justified, accepted, sanctified, and glorified without the

* Ephesians v. 25-27.

† Romans viii. 32.

atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ, the law would have been an empty threat ; all the principles of justice would have been outraged ; and all the rules and requirements of moral order would have been violated. But in justifying and saving sinners for the sake of Jesus Christ, the authority of the law-giver is maintained ; the claims of justice are satisfied ; the harmony of the moral universe is preserved ; and the righteousness of God is revealed. It is not possible for the understanding of man to conceive a method of salvation, planned and executed with more wisdom, than what is shown in the Gospel of Christ.


As a sacrifice of atonement, the death of Christ affords *the surest foundation of hope to the penitent and the believer*. The justification of the sinner, and the sanctification of the believer, are thus guaranteed by the justice as well as by the mercy of God. It is on this principle that St. Paul says, God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus ;" and that St. John says, "He is just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The justice of God manifested in the pardon of sin and the purification of the heart, has respect to that eternal covenant or engagement, made between the Father and the Son respecting the salvation of mankind. No sooner had man sinned than the sympathy and compassion of God were moved ; and his boundless and everlasting love prompted him to devise

means for our restoration to his favour and image. When the question was raised in the courts above; when his benevolent purpose of redeeming and saving mankind was made known to the angelic world; and when the inquiry was urged, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" silence prevailed throughout the shining ranks of those celestial beings, until he who is "the brightness" of the Father's glory, "and the express image of his person," undertook the work. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God;" * as if he had said, "Lo, I come to meet the demands of thy law, to satisfy the claims of thy justice, and to make a full atonement for the sins of men." This was the voluntary engagement of the Son; and what he thus undertook, he did accomplish. But there was a covenant or engagement on the part of the Father. This part of the stipulation or agreement was, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." †

* Hebrews x. 5-7.

† Isaiah liii. 10, 11.

Thus it was promised, on the part of the Father, that, through the death of the Son, "many," the number is indefinite, should be pardoned and redeemed. This was the construction and tenor of the whole of that covenant, which was made between God the Father and God the Son respecting the salvation of mankind. Now Jesus Christ has fulfilled his engagement; he has accomplished his undertaking; and he has paid the mighty debt which we owed to the law and justice of God. It has therefore become a matter of justice on the part of God to perform his engagement,—to forgive us our sins and to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness," on our repentance and faith. He could not do otherwise, without an act of positive injustice to his Son. Strange and bold as these words may appear, they are undoubtedly true, and may be spoken with reverence and awe. For it is a fact, too obvious to be denied, that God is now bound by his justice, as well as by his grace, to pardon and save from sin. O wondrous plan of Gospel grace! Justice and holiness! Had it been said merely that God is merciful and gracious to forgive and cleanse from sin, we could have understood the expression,—we could have told the import of the words. But, be astonished, O ye heavens; and stand aghast, thou earth! the justice and holiness of God are pledged to pardon and save the souls of men! Now ask the Essayists and Reviewers, who deny the atone-



ment of Christ, to show how God can "be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus;" and you will involve them in inextricable difficulties, and they will not be able to make a decent, much less an honourable retreat. They will shuffle, and tell you that God "is merciful and gracious," which we as cordially believe and as earnestly contend for as themselves. But, without this key, the atonement of Christ, they will never be able to unlock the question. But admit the evangelical principle of atonement and redemption; and all is harmonious, lucid, clear. "Grace reigns through righteousness:" "Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other;" and, in the harmony of all these attributes of the Godhead, the kingdom of heaven is open to all believers.

These are the several aspects under which the death of Christ is presented in the word of God, placing before us, in the strongest possible manner, "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world;" and, in the Supper of the Lord, he is visibly set forth and should be remembered as dying for us, giving himself a ransom for all, turning away the wrath of God from us, reconciling God to us, and obtaining for us pardon, acceptance, holiness, the fulness of the great salvation, and the blessedness of an endless life.

Let us, then, view the Supper of the Lord as a

perpetual memorial of his atoning sacrifice. Let us "hold fast the form of sound words," in opposition to the subtle sophistries of a modified or rather disguised infidelity. Let us cherish the spirit and adopt the language of the venerable Hooker: "Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, whatsoever, it is our comfort and our wisdom; WE CARE FOR NO KNOWLEDGE IN THE WORLD BUT THIS, THAT MAN HATH SINNED, AND GOD HATH SUFFERED; THAT GOD HATH MADE HIMSELF THE SON OF MAN, AND THAT MEN ARE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD."

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